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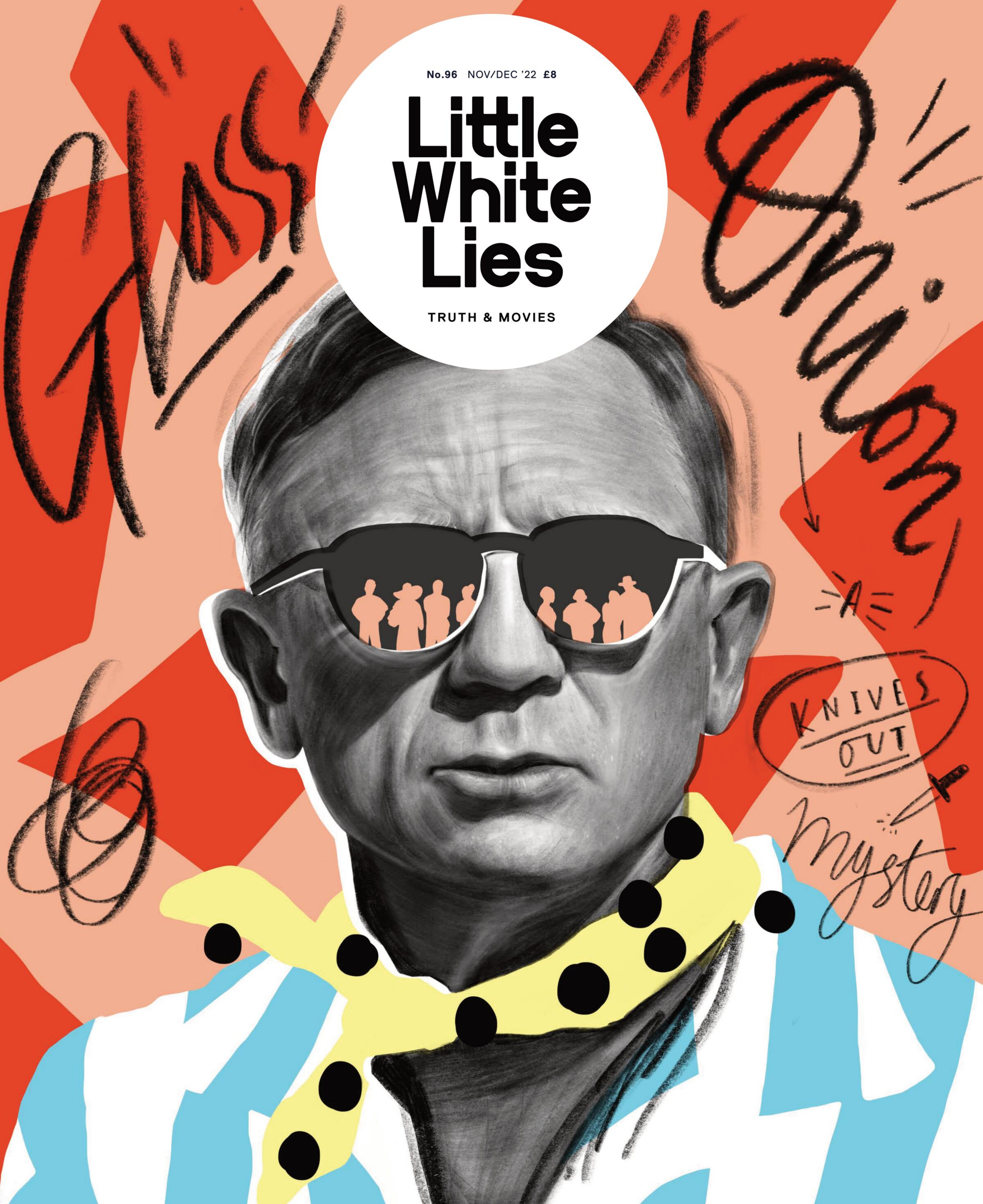

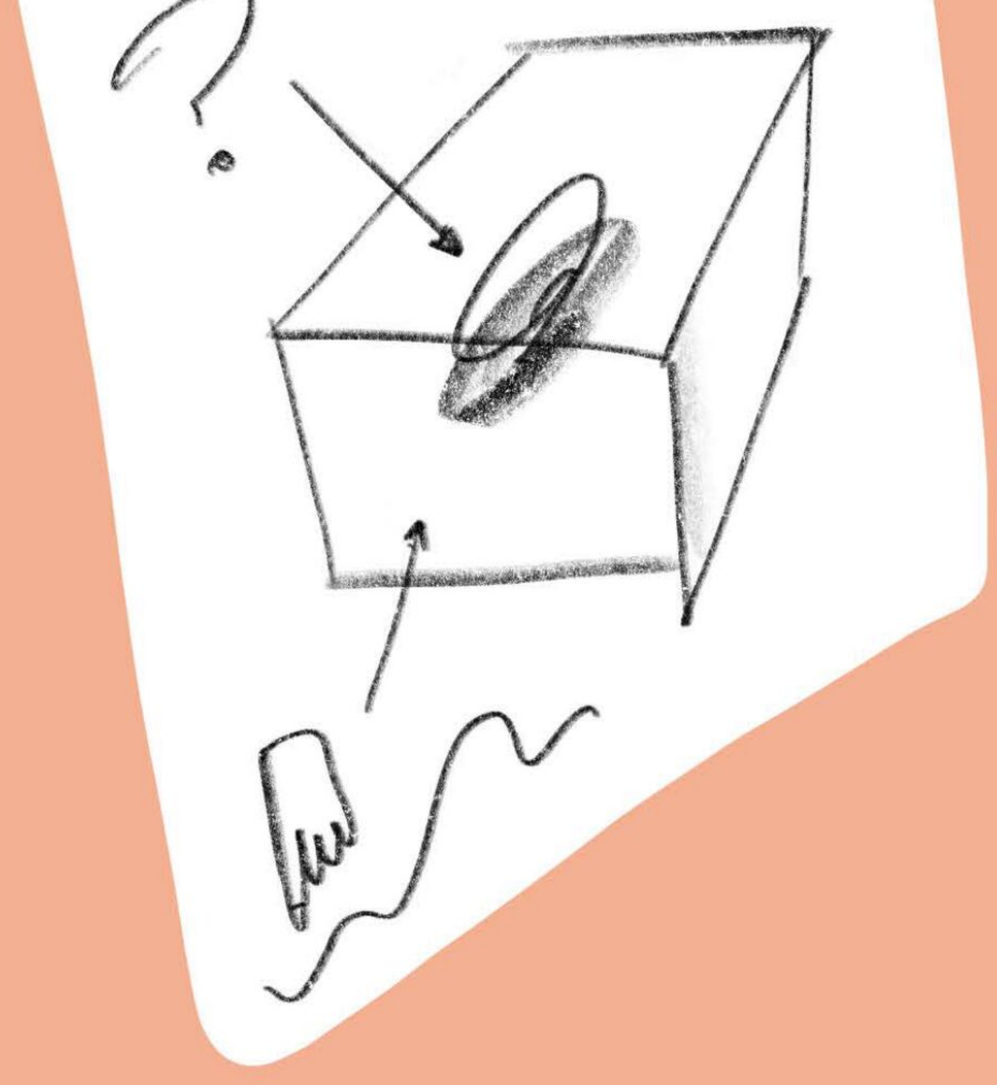

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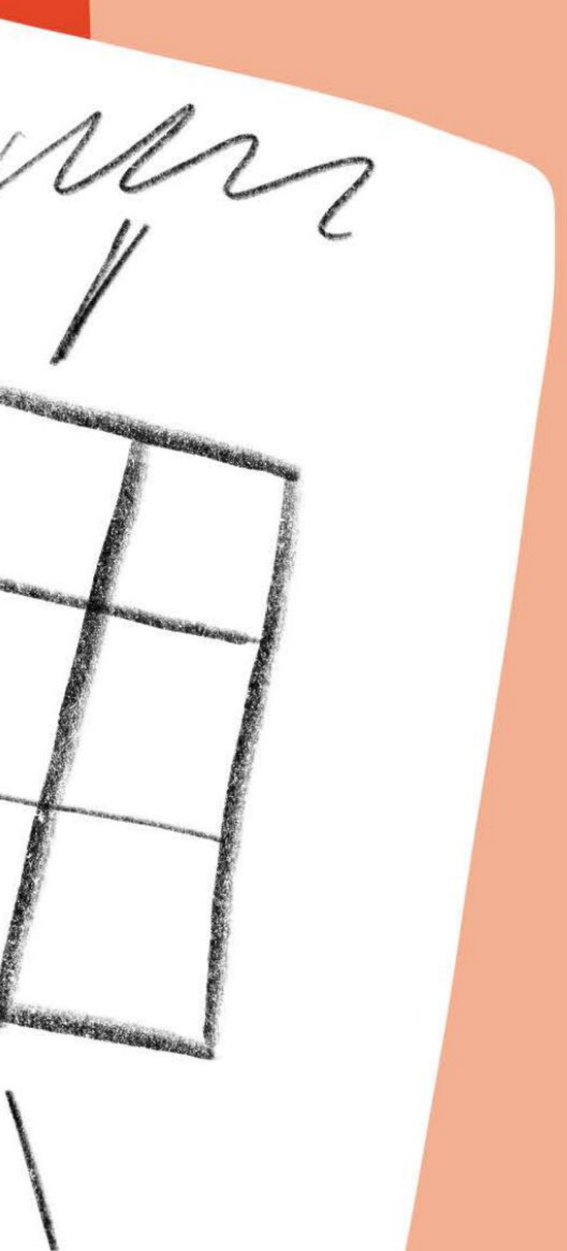

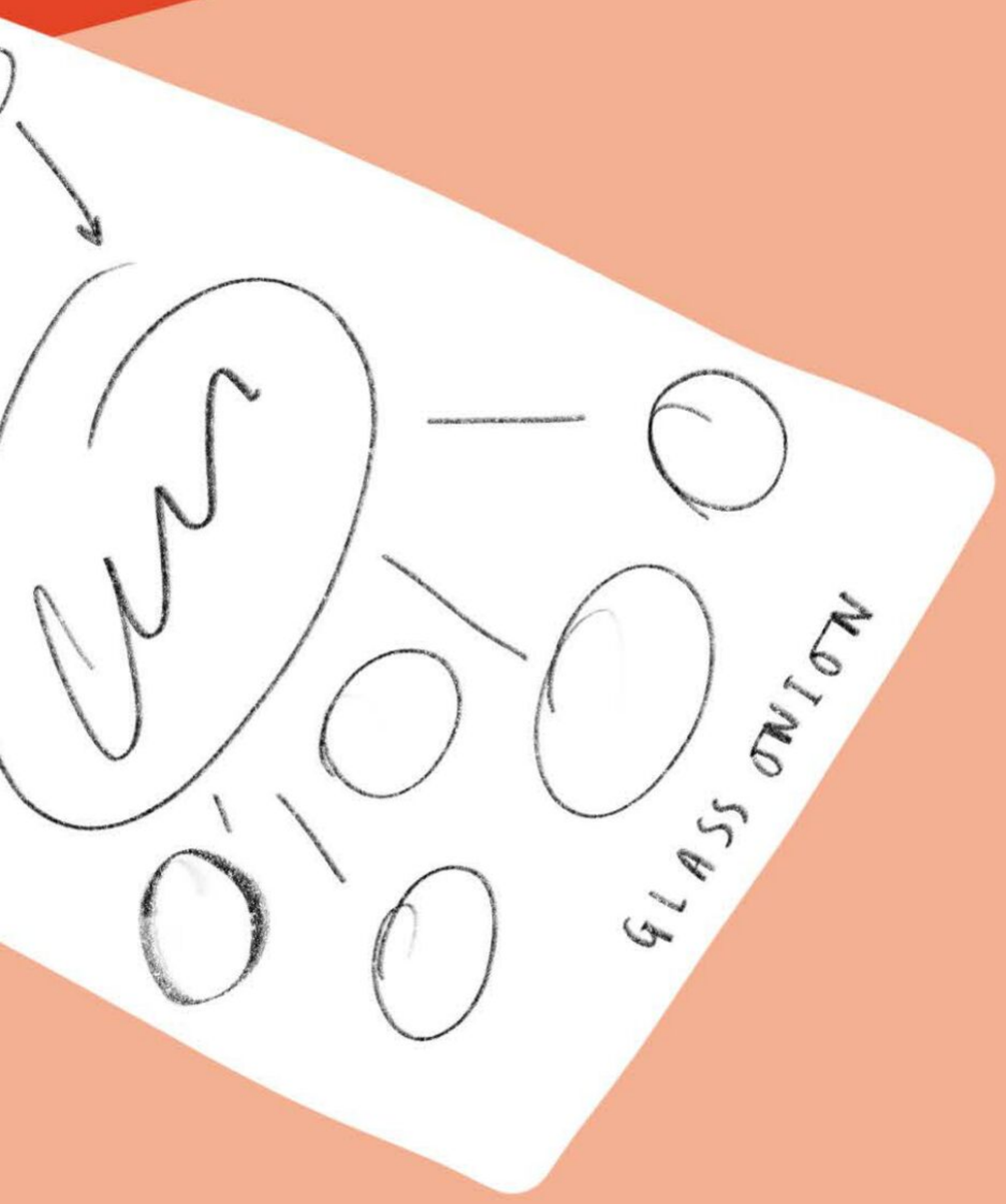
GLASS ONION

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★★★★★
"A father-and-daughter drama that will stop you in your tracks"
Time Out

"An exquisite revelation"
The Wrap

"One of the best British debuts in recent memory"
AnOther Mag

★★★★
"A beautiful performance from Paul Mescal… One of the most gifted actors of his generation"
The Telegraph

★★★★★
"What a pleasure… Ripples and shimmers like a swimming pool of mystery"
The Guardian

aftersun

Written & directed by
Charlotte Wells

Starring
Paul Mescal
&
Frankie Corio

MUBI

★★★★★
"Astounding"
CineVue

★★★★★
Financial Times

★★★★★
HeyUGuys

★★★★★
Loud & Clear

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12A INFREQUENT STRONG LANGUAGE, MODERATE SEX REFERENCES, UPSETTING SCENES

The Glass Onion:

A

KNIVES OUT

mystery

— ISSUE —

ISSUE 96

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Directed by **RIAN JOHNSON**
Starring **DANIEL CRAIG, JANELLE MONÁE, EDWARD NORTON**
Released **23 NOVEMBER**

Glass Onion:
A Knives Out Mystery

Benoit Blanc enters the canon of iconic movie characters with Rian Johnson's second foray into whodunit (nu-dunit?) territory.

There was a time when being called a "disruptor" was not a nice thing. If you talked too much in class, played your music too loud, or drunkenly tipped over cows while they slept, this was old school disruption of the unequivocally malign variety. Around the turn of the millennium, the term evolved into a beloved corporate buzzword and its core definition changed. Suddenly, it was no longer about simply making other people uncomfortable, it was about harnessing discomfort as a weapon, and shaking people out of stale habits – whether they liked it or not. Disruption became about enforced change, and was not only beneficial, but apparently a vital tenet in the apparatus of capitalism.

Yet, if we look back at the modern "disruptor" personalities – you all know who they are, the windbag political populists; the tech scions playing hacky sack; the say-anything-for-a-dollar media personalities – it's clear that their creed was hollow, their intentions were (still) malign, and the only thing they were selling was home-brewed snake oil (or, in this case, rhino horn sex pills) packaged up in a fancy bottle. *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery*, the sixth feature film by Rian Johnson, offers a clear-eyed and devastating take-down of vapid modern disruptor culture, taking dead-aim at the perpetrators, but also making sure that the blindly-subservient acolytes receive a dressing down too.

As an extension of this thesis, Johnson also runs with the idea that every sane person on the planet is clutching a smoking revolver when it comes to the question of who would murder a celebrity tech billionaire... if the opportunity arose. It was perhaps David Fincher's 2008 film chronicling the inception of Facebook, *The Social Network*, which acted as the first toppling domino in cinema's subsequent obsession with writing overconfident, independently wealthy oiks with this yen for "disruption" as a modern and relatable breed of Bond villain. That they tend to sit outside (or, in most cases, openly reject) the precepts of the conventional political spectrum offers a narratively handy form of equal opportunities loathing.

The film picks up on the continuing adventures of the world's foremost gentleman sleuth, Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig), a dapper

Southern dandy first seen in 2017's delicious *Knives Out*. It is a film which is very much at home within the Johnson cinematic corpus, as it descends from a template the director initially wrought for his thundering, and possibly still underrated 2005 debut, *Brick*. It offers a showcase for the idea that plot is a puzzle that the writer must solve in order for the director's work to make sense. *Glass Onion* adopts the sturdy structural underpinnings of the Agatha Christie-like whodunit, and presents them with an ingenious mix of postmodern irony and bona fide awe.

One touchstone here is the 1973 Herbert Ross film, *The Last of Sheila*, co-written by Anthony Perkins and Stephen Sondheim, which introduces the Matryoshka doll-like idea of the murder mystery party that itself nests inside a murder mystery. *Glass Onion's* blend of acerbic wit and deathly thrills see its bloodline traced back to the WS Van Dyke's 1934 screwball, *The Thin Man*, and the horrendously droll Nick and Nora detective cycle. There are various allusions to Jacques Tati, from Blanc's pointy bucket hat to his various stressful interactions with modern technology. Finally, there's Guy Hamilton's 1982 adaptation of Christie's 'Evil Under the Sun', in which Peter Ustinov's Hercule Poirot sports an array of natty fits on an unnamed holiday island in the Adriatic, and there's even the mechanism of a loud alarm noise (here a cannon shot, in *Glass Onion* an ear-splitting 'bong!' composed by Philip Glass) to help Blanc set his investigations to the clock.

In the film, five friends receive an invitation to join Miles Bron (Edward Norton) on his private island for a weekend of boozy murder mystery high jinx. Bron is CEO of Alpha, a tech giant which appears to be modelled after Elon Musk's Tesla, in that no-one's quite sure exactly what it's famous for and how it makes money. With his ill-fitting tee and five-o-clock shadow, he self-consciously presents himself as a dishevelled utopian hippy. In a telling flashback, we see a young Miles dressed in exactly the same threads (red shirt, leather waistcoat, top-knot) as one of modern cinema's pre-eminent snake-oil salesmen, Tom Cruise's Frank TJ Mackey from Paul Thomas Anderson's 1999 film *Magnolia*, so we know who this guy is.

"With his ill-fitting tee and five-o-clock shadow, Miles Bron self-consciously presents himself as a dishevelled utopian hippy."

Party guests include Kathryn Hahn's Claire Debella, a plain-talking and "real" west coast senatorial candidate whose campaign is being financially underwritten by Bron. Then there's Kate Hudson's on-the-wain model/influencer Birdie Jay who specialises in unforced errors when it comes to making

racial *faux pas* in public. Dave Bautista, proving again to be the physical answer to the question, "What if The Rock was a really good actor?", moseys up as Duke Cody, an ex-streamer who has pivoted to servicing an adoring (but diminishing) legion of online alt-right followers. There's Leslie Odom Jr's. Lionel Toussaint, the melancholic science whizz powering Bron's dreams (which drop daily via fax). All of them have accepted the uncomfortable reality that they are Bron's push-around guys, and that his generous funding streams are the only thing keeping them going.

Finally comes the one fly in the ointment: Janelle Monáe's Andi Brand, the brains behind Bron who was ousted in a vicious legal manoeuvre by Mr Chill himself. Where Craig's Blanc brings home the comic intensity and effortlessly whips up the drama (and Craig is just phenomenally good), Monáe brings the film its beating heart, and she delivers her most nuanced and complex performance to date. Her character is the only person with the guts to say no to the man who has everything, and everything includes a sprawling, Escher-like island complex modelled after a shuttered dive bar called Glass Onion in which the friends first met, which boasts an atrium festooned with paintings by all the great masters of history. He has a Degas' 'The Absinthe Drinker' hanging in his lavatory. He has world famous celebrities at his beck and call. One waits patiently on a video screen with her copy of 'Gravity's Rainbow' until she is called upon.

Taking the bait from Blanc in an early scene, Bron offers his own tawdry definition of "disruption" as ending in the total destruction of the system. Eliding the many twists, turns and inversions of Johnson's devilishly ingenious plot, the film ultimately ends on a live demonstration of Bron's jumbled ideological gambit. All this begs the question, is Rian Johnson himself a disruptor? Here's a filmmaker that fuses modern ideas to antiquated narrative forms. A filmmaker who creates huge blockbuster films from original IP. A filmmaker who works within beloved existing IP and thrillingly makes the material his own. It's tempting to see Benoit Blanc as the closest thing Johnson has given us to an on-screen avatar: an avuncular brainiac trapped between worlds and traditions, but always coming out on top. What he and Blanc teach us is that, perhaps, a little disruption when enacted for the public good can go a long way. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION.
What could be more exciting than a sunny sojourn with Benoit Blanc?
5

ENJOYMENT.
Insane, off-the-chart levels of fun combined with oodles of prescient political commentary.
5

IN RETROSPECT.
When pop cinema is powered by ruthless intelligence, it's good for everyone.
5

THE WRITER

ADAM WOODWARD

REPRESENTING THE PERIODICAL LITTLE WHITE LIES

IS PROUD TO PRESENT AN INTERVIEW WITH THE EXCEPTIONAL MAKER OF AMERICAN FILMS,

RIAN JOHNSON!

FOR A PIECE ENTITLED

"BACK IN THE GAME"

WHICH REFERS TO THE NEW CINEMA SPECTACLE,

GLASS ONION: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY.

THE ILLUSTRATED PORTRAIT IS PROVIDED BY MELINA GHADIMI

It's approaching two decades since Rian Johnson announced himself as one of genre cinema's most intriguing young talents. His debut feature, *Brick*, a high-stakes high school noir with a clockwork plot and killer script, set the tone for what was to come – not least its opening shot of a dead body lying face down in the dirt. Aside from a sojourn in a galaxy far, far away, Johnson's film career has remained grounded in murder and mystery ever since, from the swizzling exploits of *The Brothers Bloom*, to the time-skipping thrills of *Looper*, to the yarn-spinning larks of *Knives Out*. Never one to repeat the same trick twice, Johnson is back with *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery*, another slickly constructed whodunit that expands the world of his previous film while reacquainting us with Cajun crime solver extraordinaire, Benoit Blanc.

LWLies: *Glass Onion* is not a direct continuation of *Knives Out*. You have Daniel Craig returning as Benoit Blanc, but it's a new story, new cast. Was it always the idea not to do a direct sequel?

Johnson: Yeah, that was always the intention, even before we knew we were going to keep making these movies. The notion was, if we can make more, then they should be like mystery novels. Each one should have a new cast of characters, its own setting, its own unique tone, and most importantly its own reason for being. It's the way Agatha Christie would do it.

And what about Daniel? He's become almost like your Poirot figure.

I've been lucky to have had good relationships with a bunch of different actors over the years. But it's rare that you end up being in the same lifeboat as someone like Daniel Craig. Thank god we like each other, because this could turn into a Hitchcock lifeboat very fast if we didn't. But we get along very well, and we're both excited by the notion of each of these movies taking us by surprise and hopefully taking the audience by surprise. So for many, many reasons, I'm happy I'm in this boat with him.

Daniel had this long stint playing James Bond, and he was the only actor afforded the freedom to flesh out the character's backstory. It's not quite the same thing in *Glass Onion*, but it definitely feels like you're building out Blanc's character more, giving us a glimpse into his private life.

Y'know, it's fun to tease, to give little hints here and there... Christie did that with Poirot and Miss Marple. But I think a little goes a long way. The last thing I want to do is start building up some deep backstory about Benoit Blanc. The point of these movies is the mystery behind each story. I'm not trying to figure out ways to keep it fresh by introducing his father... blah, blah, blah. The way I approach it, you can truly have every story be driven by completely fresh winds, and Blanc can play his role in the mystery in his own unique way.

He's always going to be the detective.

Yes, but oddly enough, the detective is not the protagonist of the murder mystery. It's important to remember that. That's the potential trap, because obviously he anchors the mystery in the same way Poirot anchors it in Christie's novels, but from a screenwriting perspective if you start thinking of Blanc as the protagonist then you're kinda dead in the water.

In *Knives Out*, Ana de Armas' Marta becomes Blanc's reluctant partner in solving the case. You do something similar here by having him pair up with someone unexpectedly.

And also, just in technical terms, the audience knows there's never going to be a true threat against Blanc. They know the detective is not going to die; the detective is not going to get arrested; the detective is not going to make bad life choices. So, they need somebody who they care about, who they can become invested in, who's not Blanc. I hope we can find a way to keep doing that going forward.

You've said that *Knives Out* was written on and off over a 10-year period. What was the time frame for this one?

It wasn't 10 years, let me tell you. It was very quick. I started it from scratch after the success of the first one, because even though in the abstract I thought it would be fun to do more of these, I did not have a drawer full of ideas. It's the same right now, I'm starting to gather ideas for the third one. Obviously time is a nice luxury to have, but one advantage of writing over a shorter period is that, if you're setting it in the here and now, it allows you to write about whatever is going on. With *Knives Out*, that came towards the end. But it's still a nerve-racking process. Actually it's fucking terrifying. Especially with this one, because people liked the first one, so the expectations are higher. You've just got to get stuck into it and try to do your best.

"SONDHEIM'S MY GUY. I'M A BIG MUSICAL THEATRE FAN, AND HIS WORK HAS MEANT A LOT TO ME OVER THE YEARS."

The smoking gun of this film is a cocktail napkin with a billion dollar idea scribbled on it. Do you have something similar at the start of the writing process?

I do! Years ago, I started working in these little Moleskine books [Johnson holds one up to the camera; it's filled with text and annotated sketches]. Ninety per cent of the process is just in these things. It's mostly coming up with the structure of the movie and how it's gonna tick. But that happens alongside what is almost an entirely separate process, which is thinking in terms of characters and themes and the emotion driving it. There's almost like two tracks running parallel to each other that interlock at some point.

You've opted for a more exotic location this time. Was that always the plan? You said you started writing during lockdown... I can see the appeal of a Greek island.

We all wanted to be on a Greek island, right? It was a combination of things, but I definitely wanted to give the audience clear road signs that this was going to be its own thing. So thinking of a setting that was as different as possible from *Knives Out* seemed like a good idea. Y'know, *Knives Out* was this cosy family drama, which is what people often associate Christie's novels with, but when I was a kid and started getting into this genre, it was stuff like *Evil Under the Sun* and *Death on the Nile*, these big glamorous vacation movies.

Herbert Ross' 1973 film *The Last of Sheila* is clearly a big influence on *Glass Onion*.

For sure. Again, just for the glamour of it, the fun of it... *The Last of Sheila* has the most '70s cast of all time. I love it so much. Dyan Cannon in that movie, oh my god.

Speaking of *The Last of Sheila*, there's a Stephen Sondheim connection there too. He co-wrote the film with Anthony Perkins, and he was well-known in theatre circles for his love of games and puzzles. And in *Knives Out* there's the scene where Blanc is singing 'Losing My Mind' in his car. Could you talk about Sondheim's influence on your work?

Sondheim's my guy. I'm a big musical theatre fan, and his work has meant a lot to me over the years. But yes, he's someone who crosses over into the murder mystery world as well. I don't know if this is apocryphal or not, but there's a story that the main character in Anthony Shaffer's play 'Sleuth' was modelled on Sondheim, and the working title was apparently 'Who's Afraid of Stephen Sondheim?'.

In my movie there are some cameos which I'd prefer to keep a secret for your readers, but we do have Sondheim in a scene briefly. He had seen *Knives Out* and had appreciated the little nod, so we just took a swing and somehow we managed to get him on a Zoom call for 15 minutes, and I got to meet one of my heroes. He was very game in recording his little cameo.

Sondheim was famous for holding his own murder mystery parties for his friends. Who would you invite to your dream murder mystery party?

Ah, jeez. Sondheim, obviously [laughs]. I'll tell you a story: When we were making the movie, we shot the first half in Greece and the second half in Belgrade. That's where all of our stage work and all of our sets were. It was at the height of the Delta wave, so

we were in our production bubble, and we were staying in a very nice hotel, but we were going a little stir crazy. So on weekends we would rent out the rooftop bar and the whole cast would get together for our own murder mystery parties. Janelle [Monáe] would show up in full costume – literally a Sherlock Holmes cape and pipe, false moustache, the works – and she would have created a whole character with a backstory and she would stay in character all night. Which is all to say that I would definitely invite Janelle. And I would invite Dave Bautista, because he was uniquely terrible at it. I know I could beat him [laughs].

In the film there's this literal 'glass onion' which is described as infinitely complex but with a clear centre. I'm aware you borrowed the title from the Beatles' song, which is famously self-satirising; it's John Lennon poking fun at himself and people who would overanalyse the band's lyrics. Does the title have multiple meanings for you?

It absolutely does. Most of them are laid bare in the movie. It's what you said but also in relation to The Beatles, it's that thing of people thinking they were playing 3D chess when, in reality, they were in the studio making shit up and seeing how it would sound, which plays into the movie as well. And also, y'know, the song is just a complete banger.

There's also a lovely moment, which is ultimately played for laughs, where Edward Norton's character strums 'Blackbird'. Do you have a favourite off 'The White Album'?

'Glass Onion' is definitely up there. To me, 'Dear Prudence' is the best song ever written. But 'Glass Onion' has always been a personal favourite, too. It's so interesting, because when I started showing the script to friends, I didn't think the concept of a Beatles deep cut existed, but I was amazed by how many people didn't recognise the song or didn't know it. I guess it's one of the more obscure ones in their catalogue. It's not 'Let It Be'.

Maybe the film will have a *Stranger Things*-Kate Bush effect and people will start to catch on.

That'd be nice. We're really gonna put those Beatles on the map! [Laughs]

Looking at your own back catalogue, there's a line in *The Brothers Bloom* I like where Adrien Brody says, somewhat sneeringly, "My brother writes his cons the way dead Russians write novels, with thematic hooks and embedded symbolism". It feels quite pointedly self-analytical.

Yeah, and it's something that's interesting to talk about for a lot of reasons. Part of the game of writing movies is building something that is a piece of pop entertainment that can work entirely on that level. That's its own form of craftsmanship. Then there's this aspect of trying to layer in all these things that I'm angry about. I'm not in the business of making message movies, so any social commentary has to work in the context of delivering a big, fun movie.

***Glass Onion* definitely feels more overtly political than *Knives Out*, in terms of the types of people you're satirising.**

The first one was very much about a family; about the arguments you'd have over the dinner table with relatives. With this one... it's hard to not go big with it because every time you turn on the news or open Twitter, you're confronted with this terrible, carnivalesque reality, to the point where it seems like there's not a small subtle way to reference it. If you want to talk about this stuff, you have to raise your voice.

The Edward Norton character is fascinating. He's this incredibly self-serving, self-mythologising tech billionaire who wants to change the world. There's a running joke that no one can quite figure out whether he's a genius or an idiot.

Yeah, well, there are so many specific examples of that in the real world. But when writing the character, I very quickly found the more specific I was, the more boring it became. The Elon Musk jokes didn't seem very fun or interesting. Sometimes you have to take a step back and look at the overall structure and the systems that allow these people to exist. And why we look up at these people on pedestals.

The current moment certainly feels like fertile ground for writing a character-driven satire, which is partly what *Glass Onion* is.

Yeah, absolutely. I guess this one is a bit more *Strangelove* in tone than what came before it, and probably what will come after it. But it goes back to this idea of trying to get into what Christie was doing in her day. She was never political per se, but she always engaged with the culture at the time. I think it's something that's kind of been lost from the genre. When

we see contemporary period pieces that are adaptations of Christie's work, they often feel overly lavish and quaint. But when you read Christie now, it still feels fresh. Y'know, she was dealing with class and gender dynamics in a really interesting way. There's this perception of her work that it's like the cover of a game of Clue. It's stuffy British society, it's the body in the library... Which Christie herself lampooned in her books. She was very aware of that and was constantly subverting the genre, which I think has helped to prolong her legacy.

In terms of your own career, you've directed a sequel before, but this is the first time you've made a follow-up to one of your own movies. Does that bring its own added pressure?

With *The Last Jedi* and this, I'd say the pressure was kind of different, but there's still the same clickity clack of riding the rollercoaster. The instant you're at the top, that's when the nerves set in. With *Star Wars* it's a whole set of massive pressures, whereas the success of *Knives Out* created a good problem for me to solve. That said, a successful movie can quickly turn into this gilded object that is somehow outside of you – even though you made it, it suddenly seems beyond your reach. I've never really faced that before in terms of writing something as a follow-up. It was pretty terrifying and I'm sure it will be the same doing the third one.

When does number three start?

I don't know. I'm just starting to think about ideas for it, but I think I'm probably going to make it as my next film. We'll see how quickly we can get it together. Let me put this one out there first. Just give me a minute [laughs].

We've touched on the political and satirical side of the film but, as with *Knives Out*, it's telling that you once again end things on a positive note: truth will out in the end.

As I see it, that's an essential part of the whodunit. A lot of academic writers have characterised the genre as being essentially Conservative: a crime is committed; chaos is created; the paternal detective swoops in and solves the case, restoring order to society. I see it much more in terms of *moral* order being restored. So when you step out of the theatre, you're satisfied that things have been set right in the end. But now that you mention it, maybe I should do a bummer ending for the next one. The killer gets away with it...

Would watch.

Shit, don't tell me that. Don't tell Netflix that!

Sorry, Netflix. By the way, I very much enjoyed seeing Noah Segan pop up in this.

[Laughs] I like the idea of him being a bit like Patrick McGoohan in *Columbo*. He just turns up wearing a different beard each time. But y'know, we're best friends, and having him hang out on set is always a blast. We'll always figure out something for him to do.

Has he read 'Gravity's Rainbow' yet?

Noah? No... No one has! [Laughs]. I gave him a copy and I think he got like a hundred pages into it.

What were you reading while you were making *Glass Onion*?

I'm all about audiobooks, they're kind of my obsession. Typically non-fiction. It was 2020 and we were in lockdown, so I was probably busy making sourdough starter or something. When I'm writing I don't generally read Agatha Christie books, just because it feels too close to what I'm doing. Right now I'm reading the Sherlock Holmes short stories and novels for the first time, which Daniel suggested to me. They're very good.

And what about music?

I have a *Glass Onion* playlist that I've been building since I started writing it. 'Long Black Limousine', the Elvis Presley version, was one that I listened to over and over. Also, the George Harrison song 'Gone Troppo' off his weird album [of the same name]. Oh, and also Nino Rota's main theme from [1978's] *Death on the Nile*. That was a big influence on Nathan [Johnson]'s score.

You and Nathan recorded the *Knives Out* score at Abbey Road. Did you get to go back for this one?

I didn't get to go sadly; I was busy shooting my TV show [*Poker Face*]. It was magical being there for *Knives Out* though. The fact we got the opportunity again to record *Glass Onion* there, with the whole Beatles connection, that was pretty special

THE WRITER

HANNAH STRONG

IS GIFTED A ONE-ON-ONE AUDIENCE WITH

THE MAESTRO HIMSELF

DANIEL CRAIG

IN AN INTERVIEW THAT WE ARE CALLING

"BLANC CHECK"

AN AMUSING PUN RELATING TO THE ICONIC DETECTIVE HE PLAYS IN

GLASS ONION: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY

DANIEL'S ILLUSTRATED LIKENESS IS C/O MELINA GHADAMI

Daniel Craig is no stranger to playing a super sleuth. Before *Knives Out*, he got to the heart of a chilling Scandi story in David Fincher's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and even his tenure as 007 saw plenty of mysteries solved by Bond and his crack cadre of intelligence operatives. Yet his collaboration with Rian Johnson on *Knives Out* is widely considered the first occasion that Craig – generally known for his taciturn, intense roles – was able to truly flex his comedic acting muscles. His turn as the gentleman detective Benoit Blanc was widely praised, and proved enjoyable enough that Craig and Johnson quickly reteamed for a sequel. *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* continues Blanc's adventures, as he jets off to Greece to muscle in on an eccentric tech billionaire's murder mystery party. We also get a tiny glimpse into Blanc's homelife, and see his magnificent summer wardrobe. But does Craig share his character's appetite for unravelling a good mystery?

LWLies: Rian has said that you recommended the Sherlock Holmes stories to him. When did you develop an interest in detective fiction?

Craig: I've read a lot of Agatha Christie and I read a lot of crime novels generally just because they're fun to read and easy. But I'd never read any Sherlock Holmes and I don't know why. What was incredible was that, when I started reading them, I realised that all of the tropes of Agatha Christie, and all of the murder mystery tropes more widely, come from there. But also I was amazed at how socially-minded they are – someone compared them to Dickens, and Arthur Conan Doyle was always writing about the underbelly of life. There are some very, very un-PC bits, but he's talking about the underdog most of the time, and the poor and the hard done by, which is very progressive for his day.

That's one of things I admire about Rian's writing – both *Knives Out* and *Glass Onion* champion the underdog, as well as operating as entertaining detective stories.

Yes, and I don't want to say, 'Please watch this movie twice,' because I feel like I'm trying too hard. But genuinely watch it a second time. As Rian has said, it's a very generous movie. I just had so much fun watching it, and then watching what everybody's doing when I watched it a second time.

It's interesting you say you've watched it more than once, as you get the sense that a lot of actors really hate watching themselves on screen.

I'm long over watching myself. But when you're watching a movie like this, there's a couple of things – first of all there's the cast, who are worth the price of admission alone, but also watching the audience, and seeing how everyone is reacting, that they're laughing and gasping and getting the jokes. That's very emotional and rewarding. You can work on a film and think you're producing comedy gold, think, 'Gosh, aren't we amazing'? Of course, I've never done a film like that...

You've spoken before about how much fun you had making *Knives Out*. Was making *Glass Onion* a similarly joyous experience, even shooting during Covid?

We were lucky enough to go and shoot in Greece, so we were outside in hot weather, but it was 180 degrees and the whole crew was masked up. There were restrictions, but right off the bat, we'd been there a week and I just said, 'I'm having a party next Thursday,' and Ram [Bergman] the producer, God bless him, was like, 'No you're not.' I said, 'Yes I am!' His argument was that if one person gets Covid then obviously we would have to shut everything down. And god knows, I wouldn't want to do the finances on it, but it would have cost so much money. But I just said, 'We have to' and I convinced Rian. We parked an ambulance at the end of the road as our testing station, and everyone was cleared, so we had the party, we had a drink, and started socialising, mixing, having fun. Working out what was funny and such. That bled into the set.

There's a chemistry between all the actors in the film that you can't manufacture.

There is. But I will say, there's a lot of hard work behind it on Rian's part and on the part of the actors. There's the intricacy of Rian's script, which was, off the bat, funny – like, I was laughing out loud as I was reading it. If we'd shot that alone with no improvisation, that would have been a funny movie. When you add to that script someone like Kathryn Hahn – such incredible improvisation came out of it. The other brilliant thing is how complicated each of those characters is, and you get a glimpse of everybody. What Kate Hudson's doing – she's a genius. It's so complicated and layered and sort of sickening, and in a way you love her character, but she's terrible. The worst! Or maybe not the worst one there, but she's one of them.

The film offers a small window onto Blanc's home life. Do you and Rian have his whole backstory mapped out?

I don't really. Rian and I definitely have conversations about it, but because he's the detective, because he's the cipher, I want him to be a bit of an enigma. You don't really want to know what he was like as a kid. I'm not interested in his backstory. He's here, he's present, and I'm giving you

"I LOVE BLANC'S CURIOSITY. I THINK THAT'S HIS KEY WEAPON IN LIFE AS WELL AS HIS JOB. HE'S INTERESTED IN WHAT YOU'RE ABOUT."

plenty of character. I don't feel I'm shortchanging people with information. I feel it's more important to know who the people around him are, and I love Blanc's curiosity. I think that's his key weapon in life as well as his job. He's just genuinely curious, and I think that's what allows people to hang themselves in front of him, because he's interested in what you're about.

In my experience, the more interest you show in people around you, the more likely they are to spill their guts about things. But I think the less we know the better with Benoit. Rian and I, and everyone I talk with about the character, we discuss a lot of things, but everything's on the table. I don't want to be rigid about it, or defer to some sort of lore. It's all a movable feast with Benoit.

It's also fun for the audience to be able to make up their own theories about Blanc.

Exactly, I want the audience to be filling in the gaps. For me when I'm watching a movie, that's all I'm ever doing – I'm asking, 'What does that mean?' all the time.

I understand you were key to defining Benoit's wardrobe for this film in collaboration with costume designer Jenny Eagan. What were your references?

Jacques Tati was a huge reference, and then I'm a long way off this, but Cary Grant in *To Catch a Thief* was very much another thing I had in my mind. I see it as, Blanc's been locked up in his house for the past 18 months, going out of his mind, now he's been invited down to Greece. He's going to pull up with his wardrobe. He's looking at outfits and thinking, 'That's coming with me.'

If you were hosting your own murder mystery party, who would your dream guests be?

You know, I'm not actually very good at those sort of games. I'll sort of cringe when people suggest playing Charades at the end of the party. I like the gas that goes around it, I like the talk – we played these games when we were filming. Rian loves things like Mafia, and all these games that are so complicated, so I just sat back and allowed everyone else to put these whole things together, make up all the rules, tell us what to do. But I have no idea. I never know what's going on.

I would have thought as an actor it might be up your alley...

I know. But it's a bit of a busman's holiday for me. It's like going down to the pub and being told, 'Ooh you're an actor, act for us!'

If Benoit Blanc had to go up against any other detective in a battle of wits, who do you think would give him the toughest time?

Miss Marple. She'd run rings around him

DAVID JENKINS | HOSTS A ROUND TABLE OF THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED TO BUILD

GLASS ONION: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY.

MEET

"THE ARTISANS"

BEHIND THE SCENES

BUT AT THE FRONT OF OUR HEARTS

THE PLAYERS:

BOB DUCSAY
EDITOR

RICK HEINRICHS
PRODUCTION DESIGN

JENNY EAGAN
COSTUMES

STEVE YEDLIN
CINEMATOGRAPHER

Bob Ducsay has been Rian Johnson's editor on every film since 2012's *Looper*. He has been instrumental in bringing logic and momentum to Johnson's kinetic, twist-heavy films.

Rick Heinrichs is one of Hollywood's premiere production designers, and though his CV mainly revolves around fantasy cinema, he has transposed his gifts and eye to the challenge of building the Glass Onion.

Jenny Eagan is one of the rising stars of costume design, and has been instrumental in creating the specific, old/new look on both *Knives Out* and *Glass Onion*.

Steve Yedlin is one of Rian Johnson's oldest and most trusted collaborators, a cinematographer with a stripped-back style and an eye for crisp clarity.

1. THE EARLY YEARS

Steve Yedlin: I was a senior in high school, and he [Rian Johnson] was a freshman in college. We were both volunteering on USC student films, which for us was all about learning how sets work. You see a film camera and there are departments and, even if they're not doing everything right, it's a chance to see how it all works. Those films were shot on the weekends, so even though it wasn't a lot of days in total, they happened over a large timespan. And so I would see him on these weekends and we didn't really get to know each other. I was doing stuff like loading the camera and he was helping with other things. Actually, they had him sitting on C-stands when they ran out of sandbags, and he would be there reading his Agatha Christie books.

And then I just remember there was just one weekend where there was a slightly complicated semi-action violent scene. The director and cinematographer were stultified and overwhelmed – they couldn't figure it out. And then this guy who had just been quietly sitting on this stand jumps up and starts talking. He had the whole scene figured out, how to cover it, all the angles. He's like, 'You got this and then you cut to the other thing, and then you see the shadow on the wall...' And... they were into it. I don't remember exactly the details of how it got integrated. But it wasn't like, 'Who the hell is this kid?' I do think because he wasn't actually the director, they ended up doing a watered-down version of what he proposed. But he did actually help them. And his idea was probably better than what they actually ended up doing.

Rick Heinrichs: I first met Rian and [his longtime producer] Ram Bergman together for *The Last Jedi*. What I was most impressed with was it was very low-key and it just felt like we were chatting. And before you know it, you're just instantly friends because they were such lovely people. But Rian, he seemed to have that story in his head. He was able to almost summon the narrative from his subconscious. And he did the same thing with *Glass Onion* as well. He is a writer/director, but for me he's really a writer who also directs beautifully. He is a unique and rare entity in that he has such a command over both of those spheres.

2. ON RIAN JOHNSON AND HIS CINEMA

Jenny Eagan: First and foremost, it's the pleasure that I get from working with Rian. If you haven't met him, he is just a wonderful human being. There's a joy in the sense of knowing that, on a daily basis, it's going to be a positive experience; it's gonna be fun. And he's so well organised. His vision comes from his brain, and you see it all on the page. For me, his sets are a comfortable place – it feels as if you can be that much more creative. It gives you a sense of free... it's not freedom, it's relaxation. You can always go to him and be open and creative.

"I THINK IT'S GREAT WHEN A DIRECTOR IS KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE WORK THAT HIS COLLABORATORS DO."

Steve Yeldin: Oh, man, I don't know how to answer that briefly. Yeah, I mean, it's absolute magic, because both the process and the product are just so important to me. I think his stuff would be some of my favourite films, if I was just a film goer and didn't know him or have anything to do with the making. And then, the process that he creates – he's just the kindest person. And from the smallest, scrappiest productions to the biggest, he always makes it feel like family and like home. He really cares about everybody and treats everybody with such kindness and thoughtfulness.

Bob Ducsay: One of the things that I've really enjoyed about working with Rian is that he really prefers simplicity. But he feels this way with everything. And I think that's a really good goal. And we work really hard to make the editorial style of the films as simple as it can possibly be. I personally love this point of view. From the beginning, back when I started in film school, you're asked to really think about why you are cutting.

3. ON COLLABORATION

Bob Ducsay: I think it's great when a director is knowledgeable about the work that his collaborators do. And Rian knows a lot about editing – he edited *Brick* and *The Brothers Bloom* himself. We have the ability to speak a common language.

Rick Heinrichs: You have to fall in love with things in order to get excited about them and do them. And then, at the same time, you have to be able to fall out of love with some things, because it's absolutely necessary for the practicalities of what you're doing. And Rian is just so grown up about all of that. He does the same thing that we do in the art department, which is you're constantly having to reinvent yourself in some respects, or reinvent the way you've been looking at something. I just love the fact that there's a certain humility there as well, which isn't to say that he doesn't absolutely go for the critical, big picture, most important things, it's that he is able to prioritise what the key things are. He knows what he can go slow, and then let loose a little bit. Just simply because of the process of filmmaking where you've got to be very game for the stuff that comes up while you're shooting. He can come up with solves that are very character and script driven.

Steve Yeldin: Something that Rian and I both don't do is make any kind of photographic rules when we're working together. The style comes more out of just really trying to figure out the absolute best, most visually exciting way to tell the story at hand. And when you do that, all of the challenges that have to be solved present themselves, and then you reach the point where you have to kind of have to roll up your sleeves and actually solve them.

Rick Heinrichs: He's extremely collaborative. And, like the best directors, he always has an answer, because what we need are answers to be able to function and move forward. And he's right most of the time, you know – nobody's right all the time. Rian is a real super nice guy, but he's certainly not someone who, in any way, shape or form, wants to suffer. He's got an expression that he uses for things that he thinks aren't quite up to snuff, which is 'fugly'. And you don't take offence at that, it's just a way of communicating what we're trying to do and get to the same place on the film.

Jenny Eagan: I'm in consistent conversation with Rian and the set department. I was prepping in LA for a film in Greece so I had to get some sense of what the sets would look like.

CLICK. **FLOW.** REPEAT.

FEEL THE WEIGHT OF THE DAY SLOWLY FADE AWAY,
ONE BRICK AT A TIME.

ADULTS WELCOME

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"FOR ME, IT'S SO FUN TO BUILD THAT CHARACTER.. FOR DANIEL TOO. THE QUESTION, THOUGH, IS: WHO IS HE GOING TO BE NEXT?"

4. ON THE STYLE OF GLASS ONION

Bob Ducsay: You can think of filmmakers whose films are really rapid fire. There's a lot of what I'd call 'extra cutting', because it's interesting as a style. Ultimately, though, the movie tells you what you're supposed to do. And that's always our North Star. Everything we do, if we're doing it right, is about the movie, and it's about making the movie as good as it can possibly be.

Jenny Eagan: I remember when Kate Hudson walked in and I said, 'We're making everything,' and she screamed. She was so excited. Somebody's going to see the film and say, 'Wow, where'd you get that dress? I want that dress.' And our answer is, well, yes, you can have it, but you have to make it first. So that's what's fun for me. It's hard when you just go shopping and everybody wants that thing. You want them to want it, but you also want everybody to start sewing again.

Rick Heinrichs: Originally, I had a different idea for how I wanted the atrium of the Glass Onion – the main set of the film – to look. How Rian imagined it was very much a projection of that character, Miles Bron, and it was a different way of projecting the character than I originally proposed. And to some degree, these things are all subjective. But his response was so clear – I was literally able to pivot to what he wanted within a couple of days. And as a result, you know, that's the set that you see – the atrium with all the paintings and everything.

5. ON THE SCREENPLAY

Bob Ducsay: I see the two screenplays for *Knives Out* and *Glass Onion* as these Swiss watches, because that's exactly what they are. If you have a great screenplay, and you have great actors, chances are you're going to at least have a good movie. Because those are the very hardest things to do. My job is improved greatly by a good screenplay. If your movie has problems when you watch the first cut of the movie, it's very often those problems are directly related to the screenplay.

6. ON DANIEL CRAIG

Jenny Eagan: I had a conversation with Daniel before we started the process, and where are we going with Benoit Blanc this time. He's been to these places before, he knows these people. He's a chameleon. He sets himself into the situation that he's in and packs that bag for that trip he's taking. There's still elements of Benoit in there from the first one: the floral ties; the floral socks; the handkerchiefs. This time we have the bold colours. The idea for us is that he can assimilate with the people he's around. He'd actually been doing his own little research before we met and he sent me some photos. There is that comic edge to him. It's not all serious. He sent me images of Jacques Tati, specifically his little, so with Benoit we have this little play on the Tati bucket hat to protect him from the sun. *Glass Onion* does offer a little nod to that genre. For me, it's so fun to build that character. For Daniel too. The question, though, is: who is he going to be next?

"A WILDLY FUNNY 'LORD OF THE FLIES'
FOR THE ERA OF THE SUPER-RICH"
Phil de Semlyen, Time Out

"PUTS PRIVILEGE THROUGH THE WRINGER"
Variety

★★★★★ Telegraph ★★★★★ BBC Culture

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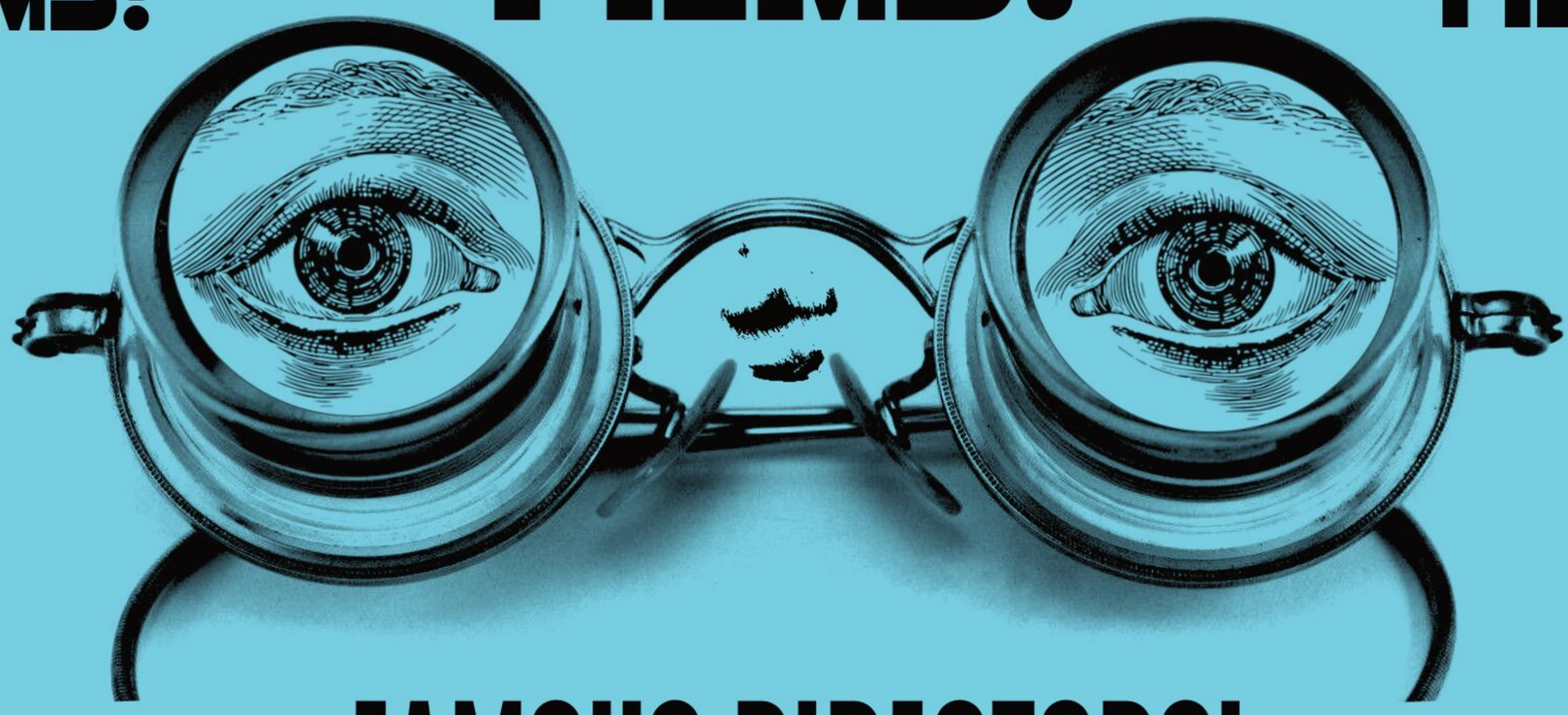


FAMOUS DIRECTORS!

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

LOOKING FOR CLUES AS TO WHERE THESE GREAT AUTEURS WENT NEXT. WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM A GAGGLE OF GREATS.:

CHARLES BRAMESCO

PHIL CONCANNON

LILLIAN CRAWFORD

SARAH CREARY

DAVID JENKINS

NICK NEWMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY NICK TAYLOR

Rian Johnson is a filmmaker whose career adhered to the classic arc: film school; shorts; indie features; *Star Wars*.
To focus on the shorts for a moment, it's fascinating to look back on some of Johnson's formative doodles and being able to see the creative primordial ooze of a man who now has Hollywood in the palm of his hand. With the assistance of various, popular online streaming platforms, we went in search of some early short films from a clutch of famous filmmakers – Lars von Trier, Barry Jenkins, Claire Denis, Guillermo del Toro – to see if we could guess where they were going to head. Has Richard Linklater always been interested in time, nostalgia and cultural artifacts? Did Edgar Wright always have a knack for moving the camera? Has David Lynch always been drawn to the weird and arcane? The text that follows is the product of the *LWLies* Short Film Investigation Unit.

1990

1

"400 YEARS OF TRAINING IN THE SACRED ART OF PAPER FOLDING...
UNLEASHED ON 20TH CENTURY AMERICA"
R
RESTRICTED
UNDER 17 REQUIRES ACCOMPANYING PARENT OR ADULT GUARDIAN
NINJA KO
THE ORIGAMI MASTER
A RIAN JOHNSON PICTURE
STARRING BRENDAN KOELBER
PRESENTED BY THE CANNON GROUP.

NINJA KO: THE ORIGAMI MASTER

RIAN JOHNSON **1990**

Imagine the scene: your parents' have a home camcorder that they whip out for holidays, birthdays and the odd track meet, resulting in a shelf full of boring tapes that are used as drinks coasters. Then, your pals all come around, get hopped up on Cool Original Doritos and Apple Jacks, watch an '80s Kung-fu quickie on TV and all start wondering, "Hey, we could do that!" This is probably not an accurate inception story for Rian Johnson's plucky 1990 short, *Ninja Ko: The Origami Master*, but it does represent the kernel of a creative impulse discovered by so many greats on such a whim – hell, Steven Spielberg has just made an entire movie on this very subject.

Ninja Ko itself offers a scratchy ode to the hyperbolic machismo of direct-to-video martial arts movies, and manages to pack in all manner of in-camera trickery and wacky physical comedy into its three minute run time. Johnson is credited as director and co-writer, and the film offers obscure but vital evidence of his skills as a fond parodist as our hero deals with a variety of domestic tasks with the aid of his expert Origami skills. The film plays as a fake trailer for an apocryphal feature, so we must fast-forward to Johnson's 1996 short, *Evil Demon Golfball from Hell!!!*, to view the first instances of his skills as a constructor of complex narratives, but also as a director with rare dynamism and visual elan – someone who fully embraces all the sensory possibilities of the medium. Perhaps the only thing we don't see in these early films is the way Johnson, in films such as *Brick* and *Knives Out!*, uses the fuel of classical genre to run a vehicle of sincere emotion with a modern political outlook. **DJ**

2 DOÑA LUPE

GUILLERMO DEL TORO

1985

Doña Lupe was not Guillermo Del Toro's first short – he made eight films before it – but it's the earliest work that he has released to the public. Made when he was 20 years old, the film exhibits some immaturity in its broad and sloppy storytelling, but there are hints of a cinematic sensibility that would subsequently blossom.

When we think of Del Toro's style we think of fantastical creatures and uniquely nightmarish visions, and there is little of that here given the meagre budget that he was working with. However, *Doña Lupe* proves to be thematically consistent with the director's work, as for all the strange and threatening creatures he has given us, Del Toro's films constantly remind us that man is the true monster. In *Doña Lupe*, the title character is a meek widow struggling to make ends meet who turns the tables on two corrupt cops, in a thin plot that has some echoes of *The Ladykiller*s.

Even at this formative stage of his career, Del Toro has an eye for dramatic images, and he utilises noirish shadows to striking effect. The use of a buzzing fly and a small windup knick-knack are welcome idiosyncratic touches too. It would be interesting to see *Doña Lupe* as he originally envisioned it – a lab error meant his elaborate climactic set-piece had to be entirely re-shot on a tight deadline – but it's obvious that this is a budding filmmaker with big ideas. His style would become more solidified in his next short *Geometria,* before feature debut *Cronos* set his career in motion. **PC**

3 LICK THE STAR

SOFIA COPPOLA

1998

Sofia Coppola's debut short film was made just a year before her debut feature, and it's easy to see how one may have led to the other. Like *The Virgin Suicides*, *Lick the Star* describes the pangs and ennui of suburban girlhood with candour and specificity. Stylistically, it's a more blunt work than what would follow, but its riot grrl swagger belies some depth of feeling; a latent tension between flippancy and sincerity that would, in part, come to define the Coppola style.

Lick the Star follows seventh grader Kate as she returns to school nursing a broken foot only to discover that her friends have hatched a devious plan during her weeklong absence. They want to slowly poison the packed lunches of the school's boy population, leaving them dependent on the girls for an antidote. Here a key theme in Coppola's work – the gulf between male and female worlds – can be seen to emerge, as can her preoccupation with isolation in a crowd. These girls have each other, yes, but this is shown to be a highly precarious situation, one where nobody is safe from ostracisation.

Though it has its dramatically compelling aspects, *Lick the Star* is predominantly an exercise in style. Shot in grainy B/W 16mm by recurring Coppola collaborator Lance Acord, the film has a pleasingly punk aesthetic, one complimented by its prodigious needle drops from The Go-Go's et al. It would seem Coppola had cinematic cool down from day one, though a greater parity between content and form was still to be achieved. **SC**

4 WOODSHOCK

RICHARD LINKLATER

1985

When asked about the short films he made in the 1980s, Richard Linklater has described them as his film school. He tackled each project as an editing exercise or a lighting exercise, testing his limitations and playing with different styles as he tried to find his artistic voice. That sense of freewheeling experimentation is summed up by the fact that he and his longtime cinematographer Lee Daniel label their short 1985 documentary about the Woodshock Music Festival as a "Film Attempt" in the closing credits.

So perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that *Woodshock* doesn't look much like a Richard Linklater film. Aside from his rotoscoped features *Waking Life* and *A Scanner Darkly*, Linklater has never been a director who has gone in for much visual experimentation, but in *Woodshock* he layers his 8mm images on top of each other and runs some of the footage backwards, creating a blurry montage that plays under a discordant electric guitar riff.

Before indulging in that avant-garde interlude, Linklater appears much more assured when he is simply wandering around the festival chatting to random attendees, including a young Daniel Johnson, who introduces himself as a McDonald's employee and tries to interest Linklater in a cassette of his 'Hi, How Are You' album. The laid-back style and the instinct for intriguing characters is suggestive of later films like *Slacker*, *Dazed and Confused* and *Everybody Wants Some!!*. Throughout his career, Richard Linklater's greatest attribute has been his ability to effortlessly evoke a mood and capture a moment, and that quality is evident in even this rough-hewn early effort. **PC**

5 STRANGULATION BLUES

LEOS CARAX

1980

The films of Leos Carax are incendiary towards cinematic models. His debut short, *Strangulation Blues*, is a blackly comic send up of the French Nouvelle Vague, particularly of Jean-Luc Godard. The film is set up much like the domestic scenes of Godard's 1960 film, *À bout de souffle*, with Anne Petit-Lagrange imitating Jean Seberg with her striped t-shirt and pixie cut. The film is a clear precursor to Carax's debut feature, *Boy Meets Girl* (1984), as a monochrome dissection of traditional romance, and parodying the masculine need to have a female muse to inspire cinematic work.

The absurdist core of the film, its intense darkness and moments of sudden violence, combined with the use of pastiche, are distinctive to Carax as a filmmaker, such as his play with genre in 2012's *Holy Motors* and Hollywood musicals and opera in 2021's *Annette*. Here the problem for the protagonist Paul, played by Éric Frey, is that his partner Colette does not produce clear images for him, so he fantasises about strangling her in the night.

Carax pokes fun the devices such as intertitles and stream-of-consciousness voiceover, ending with a card that reads "Fin de tout" in imitation of the "Fin de cinèma" title which ends Godard's *Weekend* (1967). It announces a bold new voice, who has continued to play with the conventions of heterosexual romance in films such as *Mauvais Sang* (1986), *Les amants du Pont-Neuf* (1991), and *Pola X* (1999). Carax is saying that he can do better. **LC**

6 SIX MEN GETTING SICK (SIX TIMES)

DAVID LYNCH

1967

The narrative of David Lynch as the art student who went on to remake cinema in his own grotesque, Cubist-jumbled image is known to anyone familiar with his work, but his first student film provides a point of reference to show just how little he's compromised over more than five decades. To the audio accompaniment of an undulating siren, the plotless short loops a one-minute painting-animation of abstracted vomiting figures four times. The title is a misnomer, or perhaps an inscrutable joke – a mini-sample of the Lynchian propensity for confounding. In what looks now like an early precursor of the .gif, Lynch presages the disorienting methods of his first feature *Eraserhead*, already conversant in the language of symbols and atmosphere he would continue to develop for the rest of his life.

Perhaps the most edifying aspect of all is the grotty, handmade 2-D flatness, for how it introduces and spotlights the mixed-media ethic that Lynch never abandoned. He's an artist first and a filmmaker as a sub-occupation within that role. But even in his films, there's a palpable desire to break free of the corporeal materials making up live-action, from the stop-motion rabbits of *Inland Empire* to the chroma key kookiness opening *Mulholland Dr.* As Lynch has dipped in and out of approval, his first experiment with a camera serves as a reminder that he himself hasn't changed, but rather he's changed our tastes. **CB**

7 LE 15 MAI

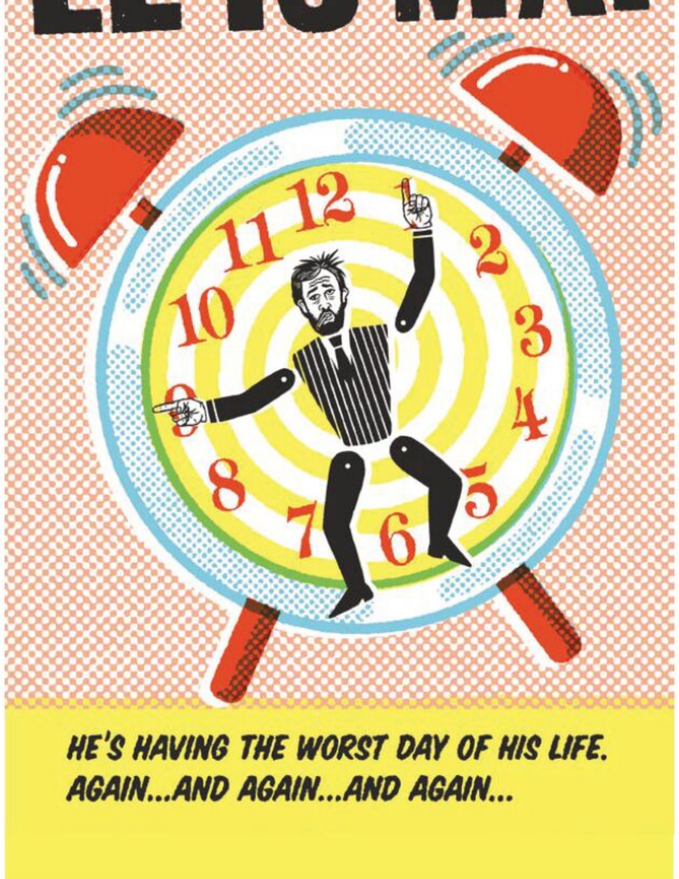
CLAIRE DENIS

1969

Completed around the time Claire Denis turned 23 and (notwithstanding a short of which I can find scant note) preceding her next directorial effort by 19 years, *Le 15 Mai* does more to suggest roads not taken, a career that might've been. (We're lucky to have this much: the film was effectively missing until someone shared it on a private network in August.) The scant information available alleges *Le 15 Mai* was inspired by Philip K. Dick, but to these eyes it recalls Rod Serling or Fritz Lang in its dystopian nightmare logic and (imagine my surprise) beat *Groundhog Day* to the time-loop conceit by a quarter-century.

No tunes from Tindersticks, no tactile images of human skin, and grounded in an uncharacteristically chaste marriage to further discombobulate us auteurists.

Yet, when a late-in-the-game confrontation between our increasingly paranoid protagonist and the woman controlling his reality grows ugly, my mind could only turn to any number of Denis' men exerting brute force in points of crisis. Even at a young age did she have some rough-minded belief of what the relationship between sexes will inevitably become. And as one who can't help but think *High Life* is just about her worst feature, I'd welcome anything that expands *Le 15 Mai*'s impression of endless genre possibilities on matrimony. Too much to ask how *Both Sides of the Blade* might play with clones and cryogenic freezing? **NN**



8 DEAD RIGHT

EDGAR WRIGHT

1993

Edgar Wright's *Dead Right* begins with a faux BBFC disclaimer, warning viewers of the film's "bad jokes, bad production values and frequently painful acting". Somewhere between endearing self-effacement and an insufficient excuse, it's a good primer for what follows: teenagers mucking around with plastic guns and doing silly voices. If you haven't seen *Dead Right*, you will have seen backyard films like it. You may have even made backyard films like it. But what separates this film from our own adolescent camcorder cop spoofs is Wright's nascent visual style – and there's a fair bit of it on display here.

Shot on VHS when Wright was 18, the film nominally tells the story of a hotshot cop ("Dirty Barry") on the trail of a vicious serial killer. But any semblance of narrative is entirely beside the point: Wright is clearly aiming for the gag-a-second pace of *Airplane!*, though his hit rate is a little lower. Any time he relies on his amateur cast's comic timing, the joke invariably lands with a thud. However, he does fare better with his sight-gags, managing to deliver a handful of inventive moments of cartoon logic.

Many of Wright's now instantly-recognisable directorial flourishes appear in *Dead Right*: whip-pans; quick cutting; visual puns. But without a clearly delineated juxtaposition between the mundane and the hyper-cinematic, his sensibilities soon become tiresome – as was the case with his debut 1995 feature, *A Fistful of Fingers*. These early works demonstrate a sense of style, but not yet a sense of purpose. Thankfully, *Spaced* wasn't too far off. **SC**

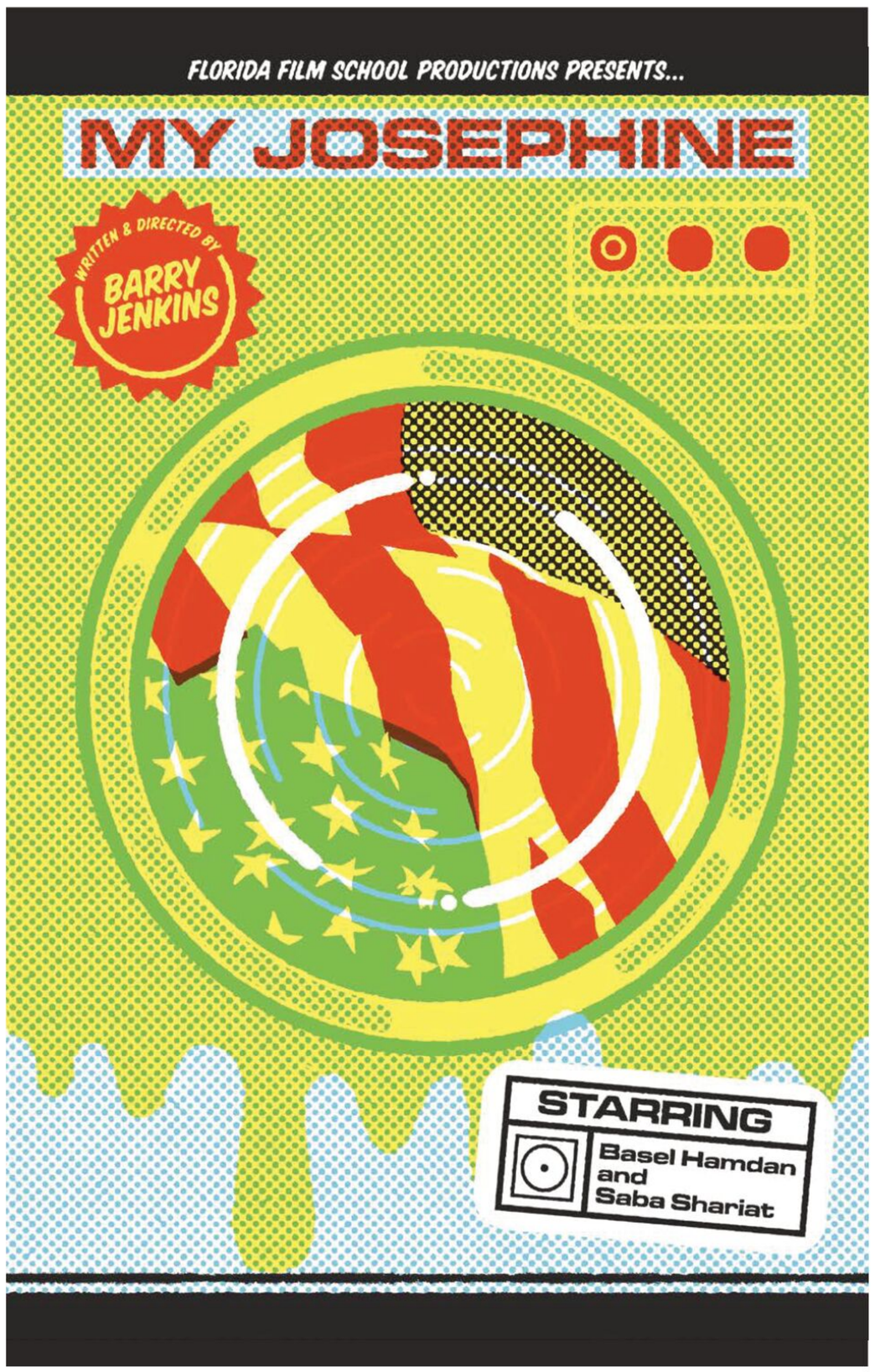
9 MY JOSEPHINE

BARRY JENKINS

2003

At a laundromat in America's tense post-9/11 period, a pair of married Muslim immigrants perform patriotism by offering to clean flags for free, a process that husband Aadid relates in the hushed Wong Kar-wai voiceover Jenkins would return to through the '10s. He explains that the fabric must be hand-scrubbed with the gentlest possible touch and dried in individual machines set on delicate – practically a statement of purpose coming from a director known for handling his characters with care. His career-long mission of empathy for quiet, soulful members of demographics marginalised by a hegemonic society starts here, with the patience and attention exemplified in the stilled wide shot bookending the eight sparse minutes.

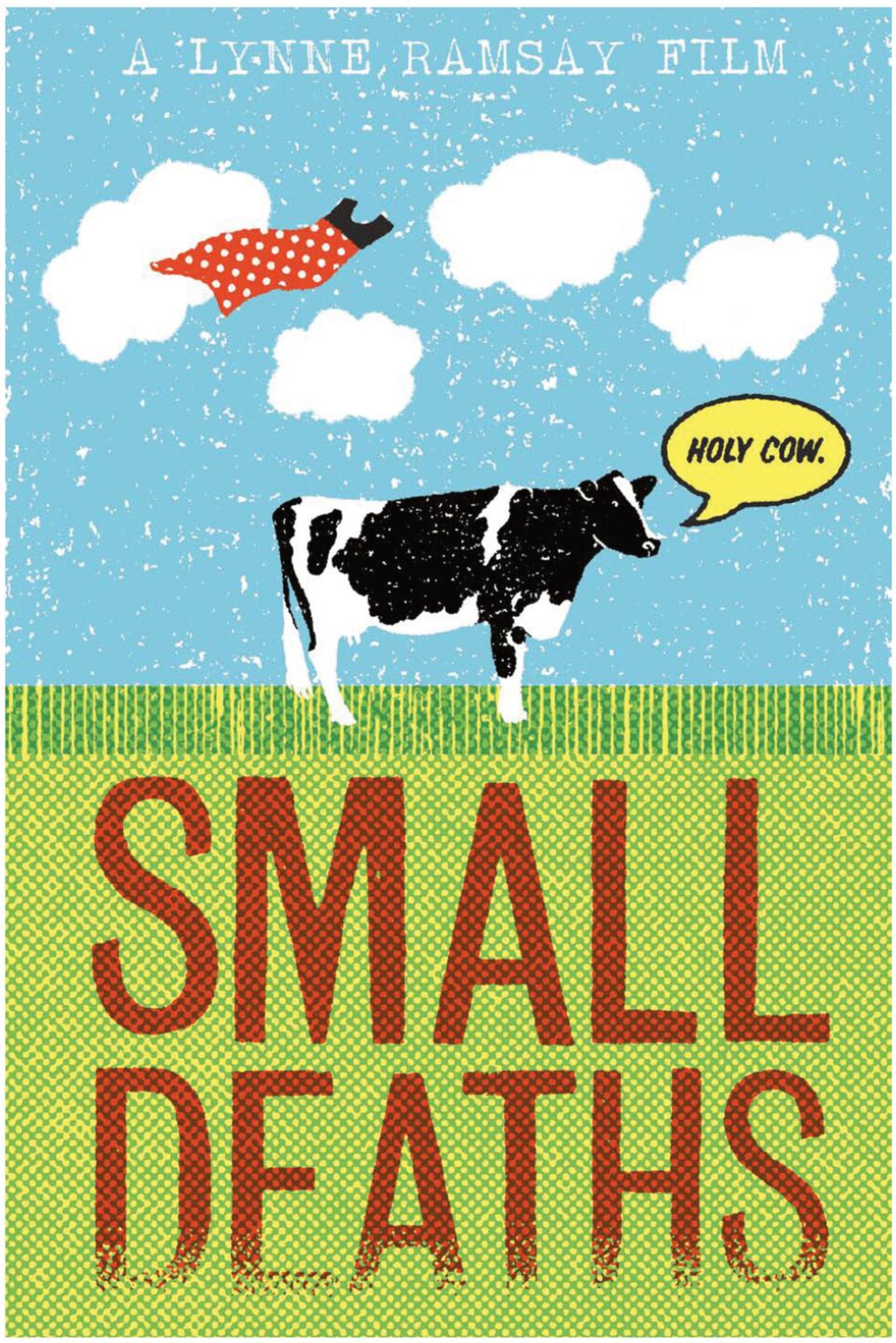
Keen-eyed viewers will notice at least two moves deployed here (a moment of emotional reckoning above a sink, and a zoom in on overhead tube lights to suggest drifting into the aether) that Jenkins would repurpose for his name-making *Moonlight*, but the real indicator for his future lies in the stance of earnest, quavering awe for the nourishing potential of love and devotion. In his all-Arabic narration, Aadid likens his beloved Adela to the first wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, wedded out of clean-burning attraction rather than the power-consolidation of the conqueror's second union. In an environment no less hostile to them than New York was to the young couple of *If Beale Street Could Talk*, the couple takes solace in one another and the consistent routine they share, a gesture of fidelity that stops short of the tearjerking highs Jenkins would hit in his prime. **CB**



10 SMALL DEATHS

LYNNE RAMSAY

1996



Small Deaths is a triptych on the loss of innocence. Lynne Ramsay completed the film as her graduation project from the National Film and Television School, and won the 1996 Cannes Prix de Jury. Made three years before the release of her debut feature *Ratcatcher* (1999), Ramsay sowed the seeds for that biting examination of working-class life in suburban Scotland here. The first of the film's three segments introduces Anne Marie, played by Lynne Ramsay Junior, as she plays in the house while her mother prepares her father's hair before he leaves. It introduces Ramsay's signature obscurity, shifting between foregrounds and backgrounds only revealing what her focal characters know while gesturing towards something darker going on in the adult world at large.

The second part moves out into the countryside, two girls playing along without adult supervision, before coming across a dying cow. The extreme close-ups of her injuries ending with the cow's eye fading over into death, is harrowing and reveals Ramsay's willingness not to shy from violence seen through her filmography to *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011) and *You Were Never Really Here* (2017). Ramsay's use of animal emotion and death to teach her child characters about mortality is central to *Ratcatcher*, which feels like an extension on the themes of this vignette. Finally, Anne Marie is older, dealing with the abuses of young adult life and relationships explored most keenly in Ramsay's 2002 drama *Morvern Callar*. It wraps up *Small Deaths* as a prelude to life and the lessons Ramsay has learned. **LC**

11 WHITE MAN (BAEKSEKIN)

BONG JOON HO

1994

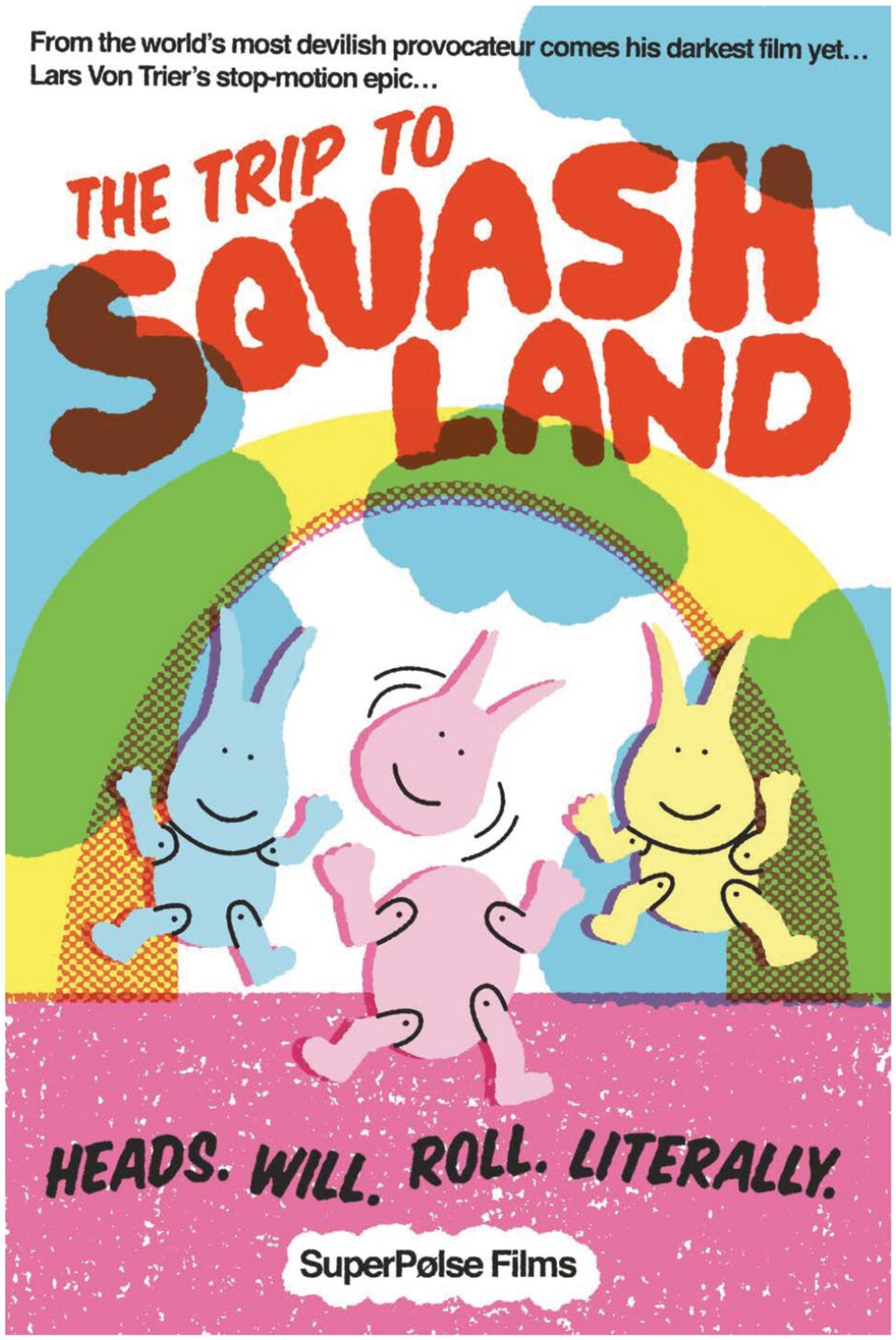
"Please don't see it," director Bong Joon-ho said of his debut short in an interview with *New York Magazine*, lest we forget that great artists are often wrong about their own work. "It's a super-stupid, fucking boring film. It's just terrible." All due respect, but there's not so much separating his oeuvre at large from this 20-minute look into the life of an office drone who happens upon a severed finger. He wouldn't direct his first feature for another six years, but every piece of his signature style is right there for the studying: the bone-deep resentment of authority; the fascination with the practicalities of doing a job; the sadistic sense of humour. (Our unnamed man briefly considers murdering his goldfish by putting a cigarette out on its face, then thinks better of it.)

If Bong finds this all embarrassing today, it's probably due to the comparative lack of technical intricacy rather than any immaturity in what have turned out to be steadfast philosophies. Working on 16mm film, there's a perceptible effort at conservation in his loosened editing schemes, which leave longer, more open takes than in his spry, spring-loaded later work. With *Snowpiercer*, *Okja*, and *Parasite*, his camera prowled down corridors and around corners like an apex predator, in marked contrast with the young Bong's relatively static cinematography broken up by the occasional, brief dolly. With the awareness of all that awaited this restless student, we're able to see a burgeoning talent straining at the limits a lack of resources placed upon him. **CB**

12 THE TRIP TO SQUASH LAND

LARS VON TRIER

1967


From the world's most devilish provocateur comes his darkest film yet…
Lars Von Trier's stop-motion epic…
THE TRIP TO SQUASH LAND
HEADS. WILL. ROLL. LITERALLY.
SuperPølse Films

What insights can we gleam from truly juvenile work by a now major filmmaker? In the case of *The Trip to Squash Land*, made in 1967 by a then 11-year-old Lars von Trier, not all that many. This charming cutout animation features dancing bunnies, a flying whale and a superhero sausage, but not even the faintest trace of the darkness we would eventually come to know little Lars for. What is evident, however, is that von Trier cared deeply about his craft, even then. If you squint, it could almost be a forgotten children's television programme of the period.

At age 14, von Trier completed *Why Try to Escape from That Which You Know You Can't Escape From? Because You Are a Coward*. A far cry from *Squash Land*, this live action short is shot through with a sense of pessimism and cruelty that is recognisably von Trier. First, we see a boy get hit by truck, then watch as another boy flees the scene, only for the first boy to rise from the dead as a vengeful, bandaged spectre and relentlessly pursue Boy #2. It's true that many adolescent filmmakers often turn to morbid subject matter, but what's especially striking about *Coward* is that it doesn't appear to have been inspired by any contemporaneous horror cinema – it has more in common with a nightmare than a Hammer production. Indeed, it appears to be the work of an enquiring young mind discovering for himself cinema's capacity to disquiet and disturb. **SC**

13 UNE FEMME COQUETTE

JEAN-LUC GODARD

1955

In 1981, visiting the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis to discuss 1980's *Every Man for Himself*, Jean-Luc Godard was asked how he might claim knowledge of a female prostitute's life. The answer was met with an apparently stunned silence: "Every time I hire a prostitute, I ask her about her experiences." Thus, I'd argue *Une Femme Coquette* located a perpetual interest in sex work, if not quite how it'd be seen – fair qualification for one of the longest, densest careers cinema's ever known. *Une Femme Coquette*/lacks intertitles, jump cuts or declarations about the philosophical ramifications of sex work. Its man-on-the-street cinematography (handled, like all other tasks, by Godard himself) looks positively primitive against the achievements of *Breathless* five years later, though it's fun to pretend his passing cameo is the same character who'd eventually rat on Belmondo. And there's only shades of the tragedy and humiliation visited upon Anna Karina in *Vivre Sa Vie* or Isabelle Huppert in *Every Man*…. (Those are invariables of their lifestyle, not this woman's passing experiment.) But it gets awfully close in just nine minutes' time, and *Une Femme Coquette*'s most energic sequence – following our hero as she's chased by a sex-crazed man given one moment's attention – vibrates with Godard's comic and dramatic concepts of male-female relations. It's not for nothing that the fresh-faced filmmaker's first attempt at narrative adapted Guy de Maupassant, who'd loosely inspire *Masculin Féminin* one decade hence. A precedent? Not totally. But some shades do emerge. **NN**

LWLIES GAZETTE

CLASSIFIED ADS

DETECTIVES FOR HIRE

Bakshi, Det. Byomkesh (aka Atul Chandra Mitra)

Master of Observation, Forensic Science and Logical Reason. Four decades on the job. Can't stand drugs and murder. Calcutta based (and environs). *PO Box 673*

Chan, Charlie

Honolulu-based Buddhist, happy to work globally. Semi-retired since '81, but still on the prowl for juicy cases. Recognised me by my goatee, suit and top hat. *PO Box 63*

Clouseau, Insp. Jacques

The Greatest Detective in France. Works a lot with Blake Edwards. Keeper of a fine 'tache, definitely not clumsy, speaker of perfect English. Can be found across the French Sûreté. *Minitel 93773*

Dee, Det. Renjie

China-based, ex-politico across the Tang and Wu Zhou dynasties. Worked as a judge, so vast breadth of experience. Was a real person circa year 700, but have been appropriated as a fictional detective. Happy to take case, esp those linked to high level government corruption. *Snail mail only.*

Doyle, Det. Jimmy "Popeye"

Come and pick your feet in Poughkeepsie with NY's most committed detective on the beat. Ace car driver. Likely to be found in the bars of South Street, Manhattan. Occasional racist and womaniser. Don't always get my man. *Contact via NYPD.*

Drew, Nancy

Will not work outside of River Heights, Illinois, where I am a local case-cracker extraordinaire. Amateur, but will work for tips (too busy crime fighting to get my credentials!). *PO Box 83*

Gittes, Jake J

Keen to get close with the subjects of my investigations: too close if necessary. Discrete (although nursing unsightly slash mark on nose). Based LA and area. Water Board corruption of particular interest. Will no longer take work in Chinatown. *PO Box 22*

Holmes, Sherlock

Clients must be comfortable with my deerstalker (and occasional opium habit). From noble stock. *Based 221b Baker Street, so feel free to knock. Also contactable through assistant, Watson, on drwatson@aol.com. If I am not free, cases can be taken by my sister Enola.*

Lavardin, Inspecteur Jean

Willing to bend the rules to nab my suspect, especially in the French countryside. Occasional work with Claude Chabrol. Friendly, but sometimes unorthodox. *Minitel: 764-COPAUVIN*

Lupin, Arsene

Ex-con, mentored by Sherlock Holmes, I know the secret of the fountain of youth, and I own a frickin' God Stone. Master of disguise also. Come thru if you're looking for: chauffeur, detective, bookmaker, Russian physician, Spanish bullfighter, commercial traveller, robust youth, decrepit old man. *Minitel: 36783*

Maigret, Commissaire Jules

No muss, no fuss, cases solved simply, quickly, brutally. Due to the current smoking ban, will now only take on cases outside. If you don't like trilby hats and a brusque manner, then please pick another detective. *Paris, PO Box 74*

Marlowe, Philip

Cat is my priority so cannot promise promptness. LA and outskirts. Comfortable with the rough stuff (goons, molls, etc). I can light a cigarette off any surface. *Address: The High Tower Apartments, 2178 High Tower Drive, LA, California (if not here, then probably somewhere in Mexico).*

Marple, Jane

Looks like: small, defenceless, elderly lady. In reality: veteran detective with links to the Met Police. Apropos of nothing, I have a BA in Fine Art. *Address: Danemead Cottage, Old Pasture Lane, St Mary Mead, have teapot will travel. Call: 635-DOILY*

Moto, I.A. (aka Mr Moto)

Not the smartest detective on the scene, but a hard worker. Old pals with Charlie Chan. Born in Japan (I was Emperor Hirohito's servant!), now based in the US. Will always turn out smart for a case – evening attire minimum standard. *555-7292*

Poirot, Hercule

Belgian (not French!) master detective, fond of solving mysteries associated with luxury travel. Very prolific. Works on clues rather than logic. I will use my little grey cells (with order and method!) to get you the results you crave. Staunch Catholic. *Contact me through my holding company, Trojan Insurance PLC.*

Rawlins, Easy

Vintage duds, ex-military, former aircraft assembler (good with hands). Desperately needs money for mortgage payments, and happy to trail that Devil in a Blue Dress. *LA, PO Box 3530*

Rouletabille, Joseph

Name literally means "roll your marble". France is my base, but happy to travel the globe in search of a case. NB, I only work as a detective by night, as during working hours I'm also a journalist. So best of both worlds. Once saved Paris from German bombs. NBD. *Minitel: 66383*

Spade, Sam

OG Private Eye, hard-boiled and no messing. Semi-retired since 1977. Proficient in weaponless combat (like to use my dukes) Located in San Francisco. Happy to work for anyone, but also looking to avenge my partner, lmk if you have any links. *CALL ME: 555-FISTICUFFS*

Sportello, Larry "Doc"

Work out of a hut in Gordita Beach, Los Angeles County. Likes to party. Master of disguise (and work very cheaply). Will not have any associations with the Golden Fang. Have been known to work in tandem with Bigfoot Bjornsen. *NO PHONE (broken)*

Takabe, Detective Kenichi

Always looking for the "Cure" to gruesome murders. Japan-based. Influenced by the Great American Detectives. *PO Box XXXX*

Tracy, Dick

Outwitting criminals since 1931. Loves: Tess Trueheart. Hates: The Mob. Soon to catch Alphonse "Big Boy" Caprice. CAUTION: Do not be alarmed, may be in 2D. I know Madonna. *Box 676*

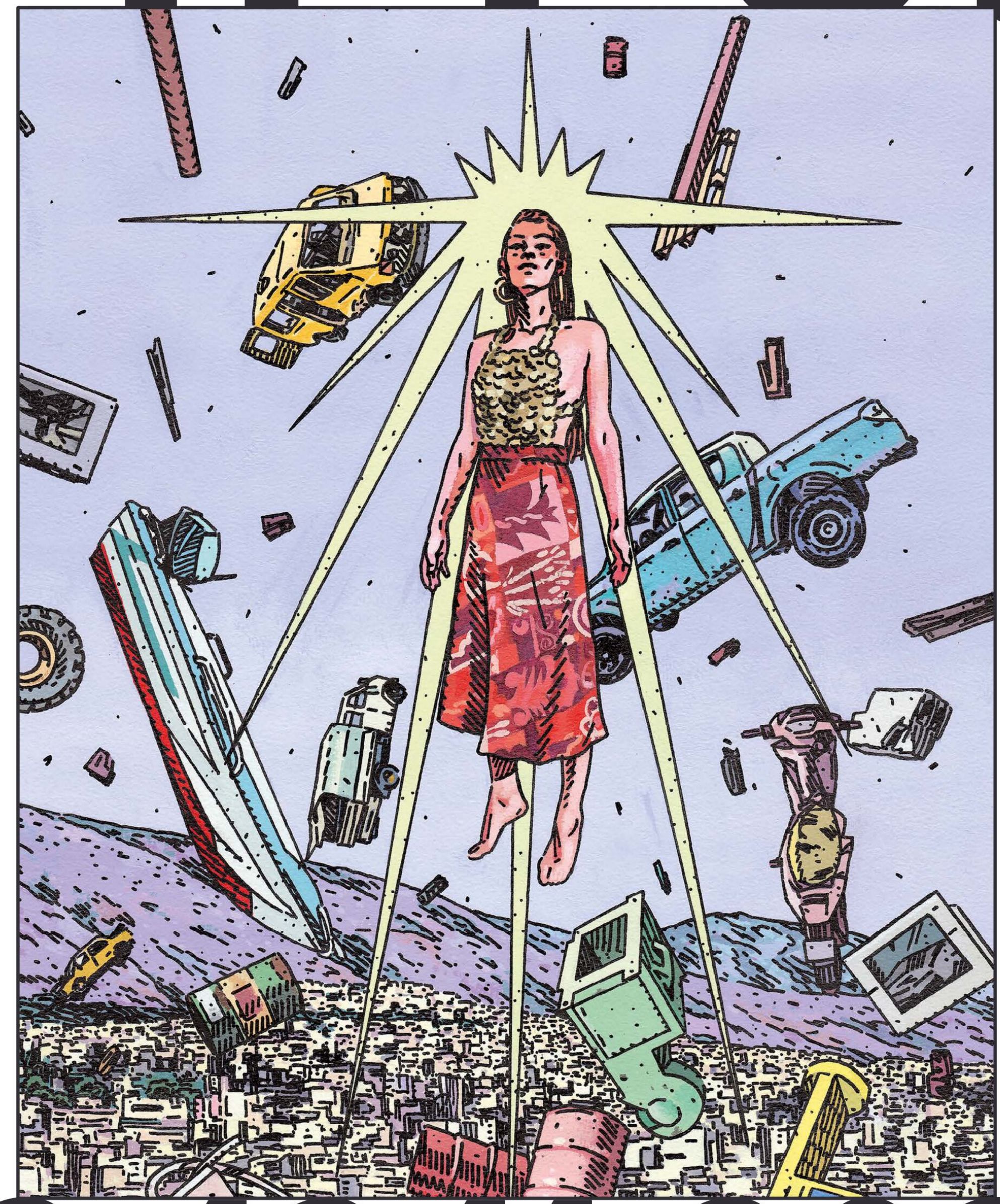
Wens, Mr (aka Wenceslas Vorobeitchik)

France-based, ironic and discreet. Former Police Nationale. Appreciated throughout industry in France and Belgium. Strengths: Strong chin. Weaknesses: Receding hairline. Slavic charm, impeccably dressed. Hit me up. *Minitel: 675489*

Wong, Mr James Lee

Chinese-American detective, friend of the author Hugh Wiley. Based in San Francisco. 6ft, Yale educated, also worked for the US Treasury Department (1934-1940). I am well respected for my international espionage skills. *BOX863*

tiff63



SIXTY-THIRD THESSALONIKI

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

03-13.11.2022

THIS IS A FEATURE CALLED

"IN SEARCH OF SIMENON"

BY THE WRITER

JEFF BILLINGTON

THE SUGGESTED ALTERNATE TITLE IS

"MAIGRET, SIMENON AND ME"

IT IS THE STORY OF A MAN WHO DECIDED TO READ ALL OF

GEORGE SIMENON'S MAIGRET DETECTIVE NOVELS.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THOMAS ROUZIÈRE

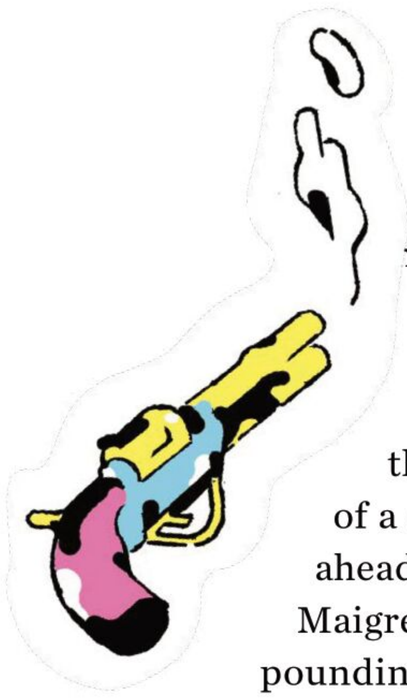
I have found, over the last few years, that my ability to read has declined. Not, I should explain, my ability to understand text, but my capacity to follow a narrative thread, exacerbated by non-sleeping infants, post-Covid brain fog. In addition to unconventional working hours, all of this ability has degraded to the extent that I would put a novel down, not manage to pick it up again for a week, and then have no knowledge of what I'd previously read.

In the search of something my fried brain could still enjoy, I picked up a slim paperback from a pile of Oxfam finds: a novel by the Belgian writer Georges Simenon, featuring Parisian detective Jules Maigret. Opening it, a leaflet fluttered to the ground, featuring a checklist of all 75 Maigret novels... and just like that, an idea formed to tackle my reading malaise. Simenon's novels average 150 pages of terse prose, books which can be read in a couple of hours, even if those hours were spread out over a week or so of fitful moments. And so, in the brace of half-hearted target setting that accompanies the start of a new year, January 2021 saw the launch of The Maigret Challenge: to read all 75 novels over a three-year period, picking them up as I found them in charity shops and second-hand bookshops.

To immerse oneself in an artist's work in this way, to spend all that time inside an author's head, becomes a hunt for clues, a search for motive... a kind of detective work, in other words. And so, around 40 books into the Maigret Challenge, what kind of profiles can I piece together about Inspector Maigret? What have I learnt about Georges Simenon... or about myself?

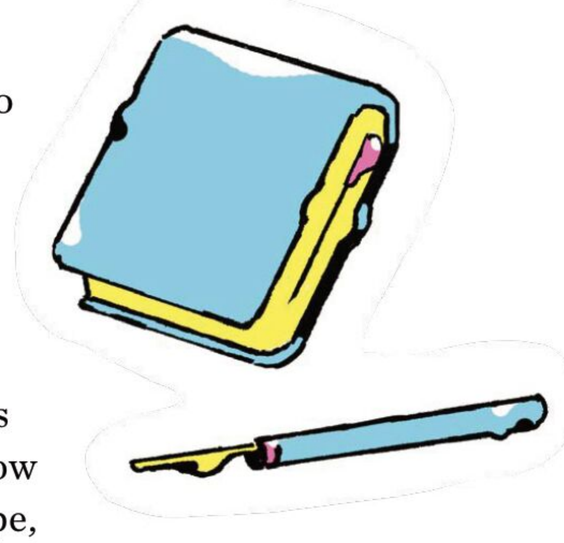
Who, first of all, is Maigret? There are a few things we can discern within the evidence presented by a single novel. He is a gruff, heavy-set man, in permanent middle age, who smokes a pipe, and wears a hat and crumpled raincoat. He's devoted to his wife, who stoically tolerates his long periods of absence during an investigation – the childless couple, one of the most idealised marriages in fiction, barely exchange a word: 'What was the point, since both felt that, in many ways, they were one person?' ('Maigret and the Ghost', 1963). Maigret does not 'develop' as a character. There is no dark secret or trauma which he is trying to resolve through his work. He has no eccentricities; beyond a small clandestine stove he uses to heat his cramped office in the Quai des Orfèvres. He has no unusual passions: faced with 'a night as a bachelor' whilst his wife is away, the best he can manage is a plate of escargots before falling asleep in a basement cinema. He takes his work seriously, but he does not enjoy it, noting that his 'success' accompanies death and tragedy. His life, for the most part, is one long melancholy sigh.

"SIMENON WAS A RELENTLESS TRAVELLER, AN INVETERATE WOMANISER, A GLEEFUL SELF-PROMOTER AND A LOVER OF THE LUXURY HIS BEST-SELLERS AFFORDED HIM."

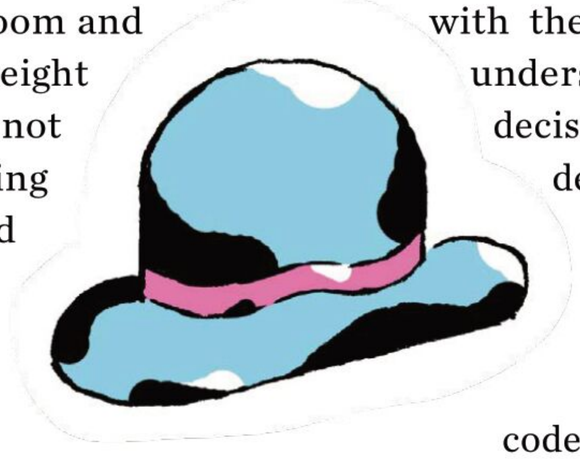


So far, so what? A grumpy old man in a trench coat; unusual domestic situation; nonomaniacal tendencies; traces of self-loathing. He's pretty much the platonic ideal of a fictional detective. But the reason I (and many others) keep returning to Maigret is that the books do not serve the classic function of a crime novel, in which the reader tries to stay ahead of the sleuth in unmasking the killer. Whether Maigret is on a case in Paris, where he spends hours pounding the pavement punctuated by trays of beer and sandwiches in the office, or is called away to a small provincial town, where the case is almost a distraction from his time spent in a café sampling the regional tipple, the novels are not particularly concerned with whodunit. Instead, each case is a spartan, almost philosophical meditation on why it was done, and what effect the crime had on the world around us.

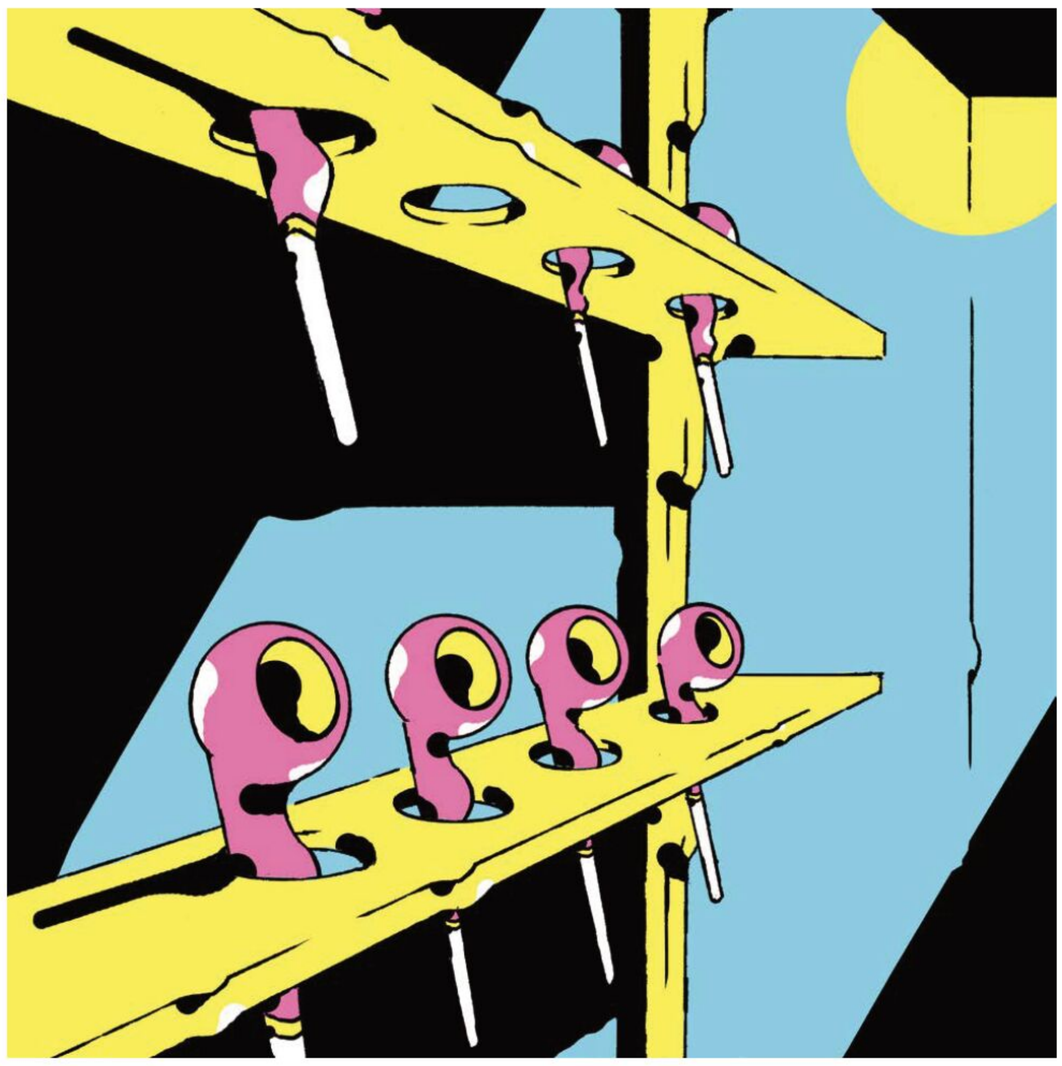
There is nothing mystical or modern about Maigret's techniques of detection, and it is often enough for him to plonk himself down in the corner of a room and observe as suspects collapse under the weight of their own guilt. He understands that not everyone gets a fair deal in life. Noting the resignation of a recently widowed seamstress, he reasons that, "the poor are used to stifling any expression of their despair, because they must get on with life, with work, with the demands made of them day after day, hour after hour." ('The Hanged Man of Saint-Pholien,' 1931). He has a healthy disdain for the haute bourgeoisie, and a grudging respect for the criminal class, a 'there but for the grace of god' recognition that their circumstances are not for him to judge. The portrait we build of Maigret is not that of a simple enforcer of the law, but a complex moral figure, adrift, as we all are, in society. We have to ask, who would create such an unusual, obtuse detective?



It is tempting to see a writer's creation as an avatar through which they speak. Georges Simenon, however, was not Maigret, even if he did endow him with his own uniform of pipe, hat, and trench coat. Simenon was a relentless traveller, an inveterate womaniser, a gleeful self-promoter and a lover of the great luxury his best-sellers had afforded him. The essential difference between Maigret and his contemporaries, however, can come to us through a little investigation into the details of Simenon's life. The young Georges began his career as a reporter at the age of 15, becoming fully immersed in the inter-war *demi-monde* of pushers and prostitutes, anarchists and artists, madames and murderers. Young Simenon developed a deep understanding of the entire spectrum of human existence, with the result that he – and therefore Maigret – understands that any one of us is a couple of bad decisions away from committing a terrible act: "It is demoralising in a criminal case to be confronted only with normal people, because you wonder why and how they have become mixed up in a tragedy." ('Maigret and the Ghost,' 1963). Maigret inherits Simenon's complex moral code. He almost always feels a degree of compassion for the killers – who, we must remember, face the guillotine – and on occasion, he even allows people to get away with murder.



We must also acknowledge that the novels feature a certain Gallic *je ne sais quoi* – though we know full well *quoi* – it's sex, or at least a frankness about it, which doubtless aided the series' huge success in post-war Britain. Maigret doesn't



bat an eyelid when he has to speak to a murdered rich man's wife, as well as his mistress, and the belles at the local 'house', a scandal which might have hospitalised Miss Marple. Simenon's characterisation of Maigret is asexual, but the author frequently pops up to give women a leering once over. We cannot avoid addressing Simenon's infamous claim to have had sex with 10,000 women, forcing us briefly to imagine a hybrid of Monsieur Hulot and Rocco Siffredi, until we learn that he also admitted that he never took longer than two minutes about it, and refused to undress beyond unzipping his trousers. Might Simenon have created Maigret as a foil for this apparently compulsive and joyless sex addiction? Such attempts to look at the parallels between Maigret and Simenon simply raise further questions about the author, with his biographers often framing their work as an investigation.

And what, as the perpetrator of this quixotic endeavour, has spending this time with Maigret revealed about me? As I gaze at the draft of this piece on my screen, an explosion of half-finished paragraphs struggling to achieve coherence, I think of Simenon's output – some 192 novels under his own name, alongside several hundred pseudonymous early works. Between 1931 (the year of the first ten Maigret novels) and his 1973 retirement, Simenon boasted of bashing out seventy pages a day, taking just ten consecutive days to progress from blank page to publishable manuscript. Uniquely for a writer so prolific, his books earnt acclaim from contemporary literary titans such as Celine, André Gide, Henry Miller, Albert Camus and Colette, once his editor, who advised him to pare down his style by cutting anything 'literary' or 'beautiful', resulting in a distinctive minimalist style (which would omit around half the words I've used in this piece). Simenon, then, seems to exemplify the ideal of writer as unpretentious grafter, putting my own indiscipline, as I spend twenty minutes choosing an LP to put on between edits, to shame. But let's delve a little deeper... Simenon also found the pressure of writing so intense that he would collapse in a vomiting mess upon reaching his daily day's quota, and had to consult a doctor before beginning a new book, such was the strain he put himself under. Faced with this additional evidence, perhaps I should be a little more like Maigret, and be less judgemental about my own work? As I type this, I can imagine the man himself grumbling away at such nonsense.

It's clear that further investigation is required. With around a year left on the Maigret Challenge, I'm enjoying it too much to part company with either writer or creator. So,

what next?

Well, there's a hundred or so of the standalone novels Simenon termed *romans durs*,

literally 'tough novels', claustrophobic Dostoyevskian micro-epics of psychological and existential torment.

They should keep me going for a few more years

KYLE TURNER PRESENTS

"TO KILL FOR LOVE IS SUCH A THRILL"

A PIECE ON THE LATE, VERY GREAT

STEPHEN SONDHEIM

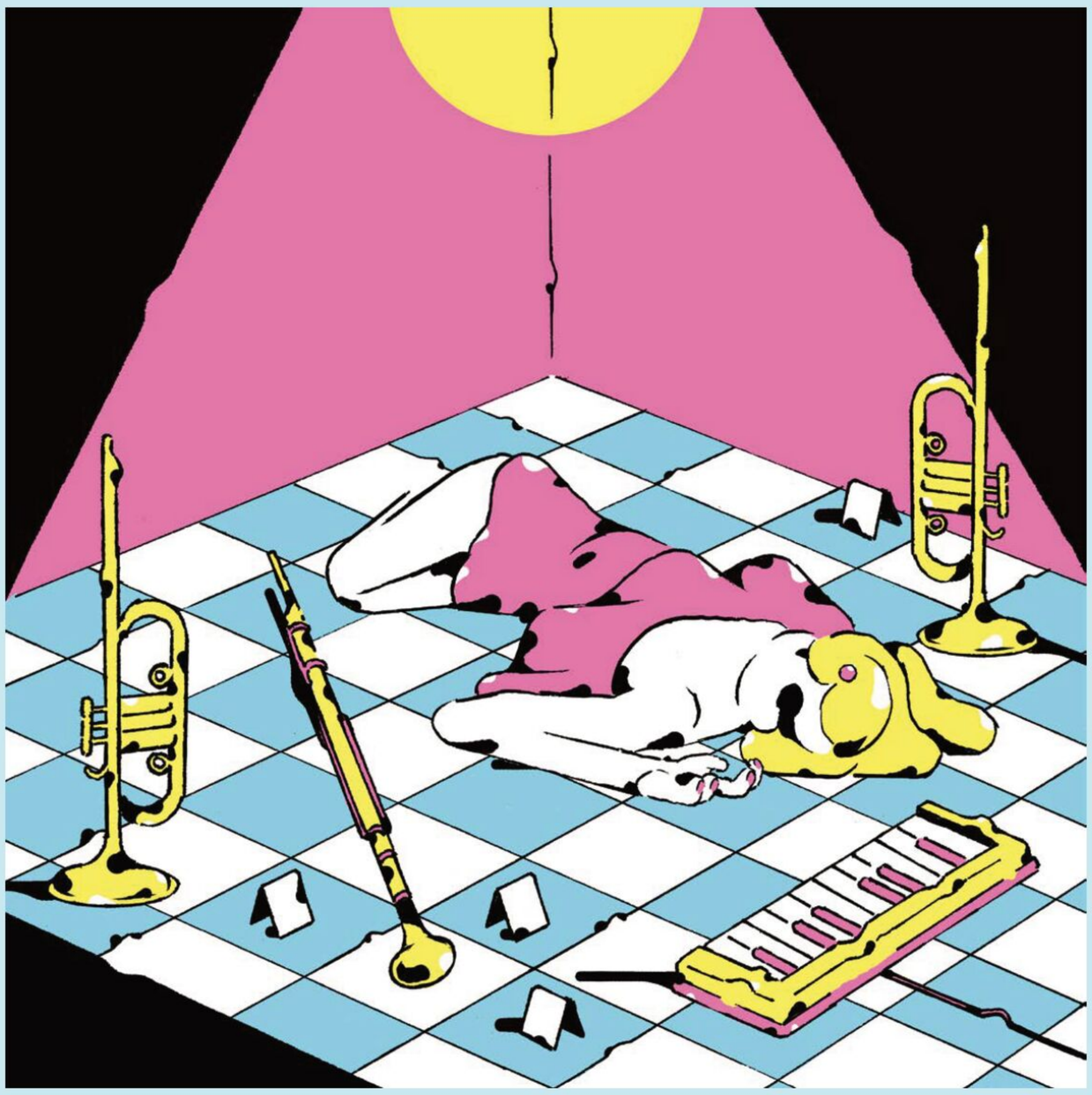
RELATING TO HIS FONDNESS FOR THE TIME-HONOURED

MURDER MYSTERY

The bittersweet flavour at the bottom of the pies in Stephen Sondheim's 1979 musical, 'Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street', is human. Literally of course, but also in the way that its mastermind composer lyricist made a gambit of by borrowing elements from a genre he adored: the murder mystery. He loved its codes, schemes and strategies. He put them into the grinder to produce sophisticated delicacies of modern musical theatre. His interest in murder mysteries placed one thing he understood (games, puzzles) and one thing he did not (people, human relationships) in conversation with one another. It was as if the structures of the genre facilitated a push and pull between the cleanliness of a game with established rules and the chaos of human spirit.

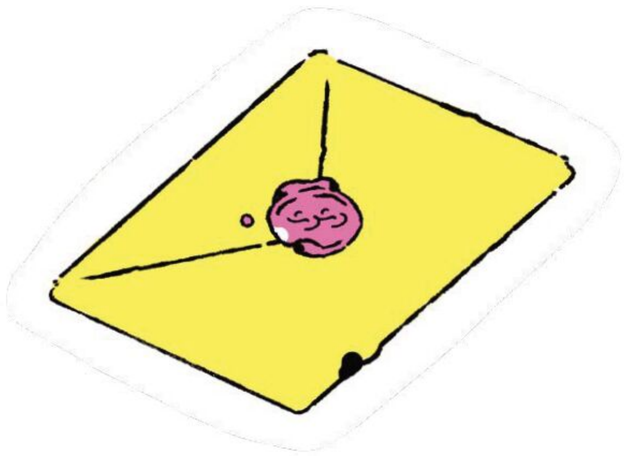
While his devotion to the whodunit is suffused throughout his theatre work in more abstract ways, Sondheim ventured into making a real killing with his sole feature screenplay credit. There's something delightfully nasty about the ending of Herbert Ross's 1973 whodunit feature, *The Last of Sheila*. When the game is over – it always starts with a game, doesn't it? – everything comes down to what's at the core of its all-too-human characters who are mostly Hollywood industry types whose souls have been bankrupted by their work and life.

It makes sense that the film would want to mix brash genre pleasures with a peculiar substantiveness. It treats its movie producer (James Coburn), actress (Raquel Welch), film director (James Mason), screenwriter (Richard Benjamin) and dowager wife (Joan Hackett), plus two talent agents (Dyan Cannon and Ian McShane), who have all been brought together on a yacht under the guise of an elaborate scavenger hunt that turns fatal, with a level of seriousness. And only when the murderer has been revealed does the ball for screenplay potential start rolling, even before most of the blood has dried. But, nasty is not the same as glib, and despite its razor tongued wit, The Last of Sheila still finds it worth burrowing into these characters' heads.



For the composer and lyricist of musicals such as 'Company' (1970), 'Follies' (1971), and 'Into the Woods' (1986), there were few delights quite like a puzzle. Puzzles have solutions, and, as Isaac Butler implies in his Sondheim obituary for *Slate*, "solace." He fostered his adoration for them to such an extent that he and Perkins would throw complicated and intricately crafted murder mystery parties, and out of this love was born *The Last of Sheila*, which was released shortly after 'A Little Night Music' – his take on Ingmar Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night* – would premiere on Broadway. Aside from this literal manifestation of Sondheim's kink for

"MURDER HAS AN ARTFULNESS TO IT. THERE ARE ENOUGH MYSTERY NOVELS TO SUGGEST AS SUCH. BUT SONDHEIM'S WORK SHOWS THAT IT WAS THE 'WHY' THAT WAS THE ART."

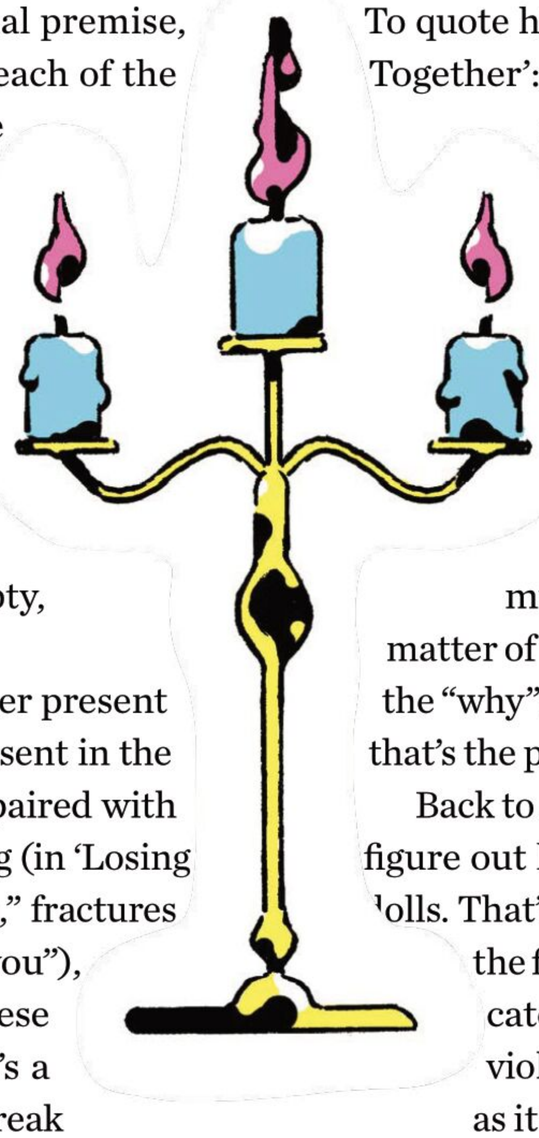


puzzles, there were clues elsewhere to be seen by those who were looking hard enough.

'Follies' is a Robert Altman-meets-David Lynch fever dream in which the ghosts of past lives and the resurrection of painful regrets, all set at the reunion party for a bunch of New York dancers in the theatre they once performed in the night before it's demolished. It also began life as a murder mystery called 'The Girls Upstairs'. Written with book writer James Goldman, 'Follies' moved away from its original premise, where act one would leave the audience with each of the four leads' motives and act two would be the ticking time bomb for – as director Hal Prince called it in the *New York Times* – a "who'll do it?", to its (mostly) present state (Goldman rewrote the book several times). But, for Sondheim, a mystery remained: its two main couples (Sally and Buddy, Phyllis and Ben) want so much from each other and from the world, that they are left wondering why their lives, which the characters see as empty, happened to them.

'Follies' is doused in a cynicism that only ever present small glimmers of light, and they are mostly present in the bombast and artifice of its showmanship. Yet, paired with Sondheim's ornate writing and clever structuring (in 'Losing My Mind', "I dim the lights and think about you," fractures into, "Spend sleepless night to think about you"), the composer-lyricist makes the world in these characters inhabit a old dark house of soul. It's a place that makes their heartbeat and helps to break the mystery.

That element of mystery has always resided at the centre of Sondheim's work, and while the only other straight murder mystery he'd write would be the flop play 'Getting Away with Murder' with George Furth in 1996, he understood the most important lesson from murder mysteries could also be an essential component for his musicals. The best of their kind are whydunit?s masquerading as whodunit?s, panoramas of unpredictable human behaviour made legible through song.



It's less that Sondheim was drawn to explicitly writing these types of stories than he was intrigued at borrowing their principles and tenets. A constellation of characters who orbit one person as a way to betray everyone else's neuroses stains Company, whose splintered and nonlinear structure, revolving around a perpetual bachelor named Bobby and his group of married friends, makes each character like a sliding block within its protagonist's psyche, fitting into his idea of marriage. To quote his eternal toe-tapper, 'The Little Things You Do Together': "It's not so hard to be married/it's much the cleanest of crimes."

The reckless scheming of a vengeful, razor-wielding barber and his pastry chef lover pushes past Grand Guignol and makes a spectacle of a whydunit? in 'Sweeney Todd'. It's a place where murder is obviously on the menu, but so too are motives. Here, the murder mystery, with a book by Hugh Wheeler, is inverted: the audience knows the murderer and who he's going to murder, it's a matter of then spending time suffocating its audience with the "why". (Todd himself sneers, "What happens then/well that's the play/and he wouldn't want us to give it away".)

Back to *Sheila*: it's diabolical to write about other people, figure out how they work and play around with them like dolls. That's what the game everyone plays is, and then, too, the film that starts gestating in the minds of killer and catcher. It's like a kind of, forgive me, ontological violence. Yet writing about other people is as human as it is sadistic.

Murder has an artfulness to it. There are enough mystery novels to suggest as such. But Sondheim's work shows that it was the "why" that was the art. The why – fickle and fuzzy and hard to explain– is what audiences care about. Sondheim makes a nesting doll out of the human condition: it's packed within the claws of gilded rhymes and vine-like melodies. What if Sondheim was a murderer in a way? Deconstruction as the weapon. Taking a form he loved and stripping its flesh, skinning it to get at the heart?

INTREPID EXPLORER AND ARMCHAIR MUSICOLOGIST

MICHAEL LEADER

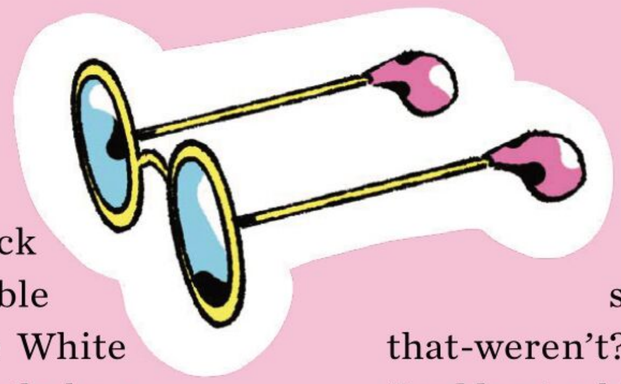
T R A V E L S

"ACROSS THE UNIVERSE"

IN SEARCH OF HOW THE MUSIC AND ICONOGRAPHY OF

THE BEATLES

INFILTRATED AND INFLUENCED CINEMA

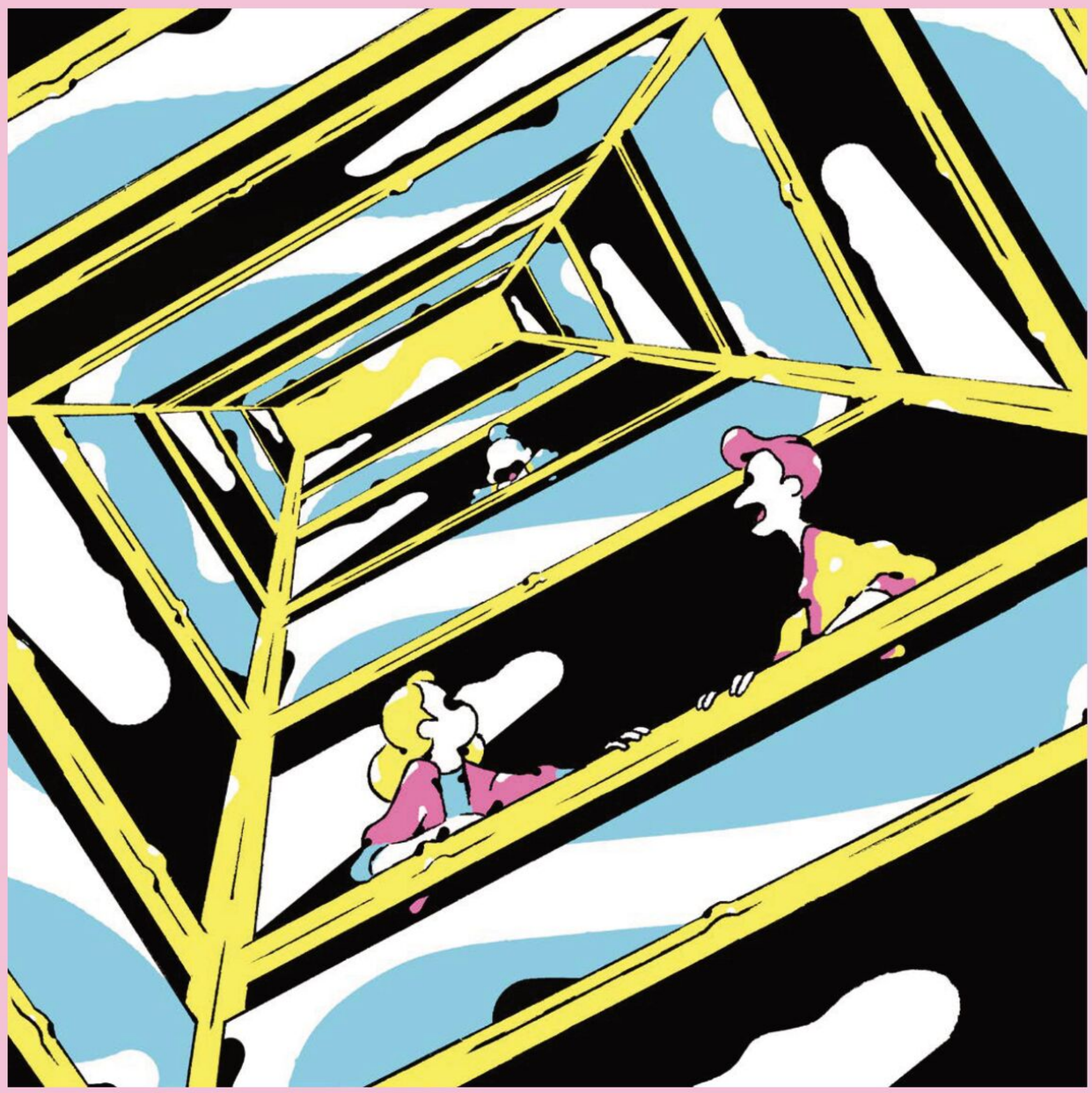


‘Glass Onion’, the third track on the Beatles’ 1968 double LP (commonly called ‘The White Album’) is a puckish exercise in self-mythology. “I told you about Strawberry Fields / you know the place where nothing is real,” hisses John Lennon at the start of the song, “well here’s another place you can go, where everything flows.” The lyrics combine confounding, red-herring references to Beatle tunes ranging from ‘I am the Walrus’ to ‘Lady Madonna’, while its refrain, “looking through a glass onion,” suggests a kaleidoscopic epiphany that, ultimately, isn’t there. It’s Lennon’s jab at the fans who obsessively search for hidden meaning in their music. Conversely, *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery*, Rian Johnson’s murder-mystery thriller, has a couple of oblique references to the Fab Four, including the titular bop played over the closing credits, but looking through it reveals the entire constellation of the BCU (Beatles Cinematic Universe).

The reign of John, Paul, George and Ringo was as much an on-screen phenomenon as an on-record one. After all, Beatlemania was spurred on by uproarious televised appearances at the 1963 Royal Variety Performance and, a year later, on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. And the Beatles’ evolution as artists and personalities was captured across four feature films: *A Hard Day’s Night*; *Help!; Magical Mystery Tour*; *Yellow Submarine*; and one documentary (*Let it Be*), released during the band’s lifetime. And that didn’t stop when they broke up: the supernova of their pop-cultural moment scattered the Beatles throughout cinema, birthing biopics, rock docs, jukebox musicals, cameo appearances, vanity projects, spoofs and everything in between.

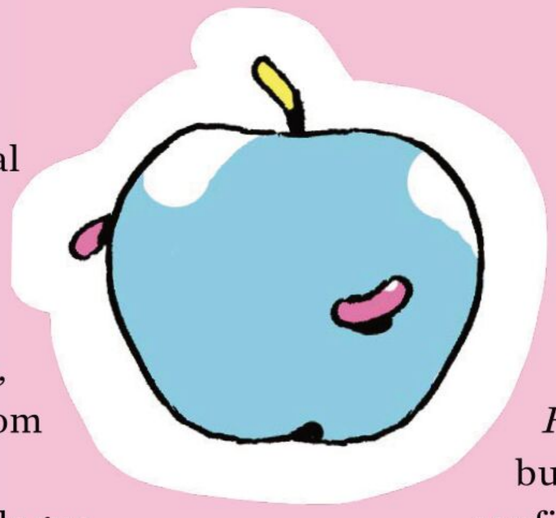
The more prosaic of these are exercises in fleshing out the established biography. Want to know about John’s emotional baggage before he formed the band? Sam Taylor-Johnson has you covered with the 2009 Lennon origin story *Nowhere Boy*. How about the Beatles-that-weren’t? Simply track down Iain Softley’s 1994 film *Backbeat*, which dramatises the tragic story of the band’s first bassist, Stuart Sutcliffe (Stephen Dorff). There’s even 1979 oddity *Birth of the Beatles*, which was guided to the screen with help from ‘technical advisor’ Pete Best, the drummer booted from the group to make way for Ringo.

Moving a little way through the documentary looking glass and we have fan-fiction docudrama *Two of Us*, directed by Michael Lindsay-Hogg, which homes in on a single evening in 1976 that has held considerable fascination for Beatle die-hards: the night where Paul (Aidan Quinn) paid a surprise visit to John (Jared Harris), and reportedly considered reforming the band for a spontaneous



appearance on *Saturday Night Live*. "This fictional film is not endorsed by any person depicted herein and neither such persons nor their families, heirs or related parties have participated in the making of this film," the opening crawl makes clear. "Rather, it is a work of fiction in appreciation of two blokes from Liverpool, and the gifts they gave us."

But what about the songs, man? The Beatles' catalogue has been shoehorned into several soundtracks' worth of musicals, sometimes in defiance of narrative sense and good taste. Oscar-bait drama *I Am Sam*, from 2001, netted Sean Penn a Best Actor nomination for his performance as an intellectually disabled man whose love for his daughter (named, naturally, Lucy) is only matched by his love of the Beatles, with their songs and worldview informing his gruelling battle for parental custody. There's a Lucy, too, in Julie Taymor's vivid but vapid 2007 musical *Across the Universe*; there's also a Jude, Max, Sadie, Jo-Jo, Doctor Robert and Mr Kite filling out the Beatle-reference bingo card. But those films pale in comparison to the garish, misconceived 1978 rock opera, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Released in the wake of *Saturday Night Fever*, the film tried to turn the already-iconic album into a musical motion picture fantasia on the scale of Ken Russell's *Tommy*, albeit with the responsibility of out-Beatling the Beatles falling due to some woeful casting choices, which included Peter Frampton and the flippin' Bee Gees.



The distinction of the Beatles, though, is that they are more than their story, and more, even, than their songs. ABBA may have *Mamma Mia*, and Elton may have *Rocketman* and *Gnomeo and Juliet*, but the Beatles on screen aren't just confined to films specifically about – or soundtracked by – themselves. Their legacy passes between generations, and their famous fans in film and television have helped keep them relevant for decades.

It was the baby-boomer filmmakers, the generation that were once the screaming kids clutching Beatles lunch boxes in the 1960s, who first carried the torch. The Beatlemania comedy *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, a Spielberg-produced 1978 debut from director Robert Zemeckis and screenwriter Bob Gale, told the story of the Beatles' legendary arrival on US shores from the perspective of an ensemble of hyperactive fans, desperately trying to claw through the mob to get closer to their idols. It's telling that a decade-and-a-half later in 1994's *Forrest Gump*, Zemeckis and his VFX teams marshalled cutting-edge technology to make it so that their fictional Boomer Everyman met John Lennon.

For all his associations with soundtracks packed with New Wave bangers, writer-director-tastemaker John Hughes was a Beatles fan at heart. In 1985's *The Breakfast Club*, Carl the Janitor may speak for the filmmaker himself when he whimsically remembers that, as a kid, he wanted to be Lennon. Yet, as a teen-movie auteur, Hughes put the Beatles into the mouths of his characters. Anthony Michael Hall sings 'Birthday' (another 'White Album' deep cut) to Molly Ringwald in 1984's *Sixteen Candles*, while Ferris Bueller, a rare Hughes lead with rock-star charisma, literally stops traffic in downtown Chicago to lead a crowd of bystanders through a rousing rendition of 'Twist and Shout'.

They're all there, hiding in plain sight. When Whoopi Goldberg's club singer in 1992's *Sister Act* declares in a childhood flashback that the four apostles were "John, Paul, George and Ringo", that's not just a simple joke: Goldberg was one of the 55,000 fans in the crowd at the Beatles' historic Shea Stadium gig in August 1965 – taken, as she fondly recalls in Ron Howard's 2018 documentary *The Beatles: Eight Days A Week*, by her mother. Similarly, when Mike Myers drops Beatles gags into almost all of his films, from the 'Shitty Beatles' of *Wayne's World*, through to the Hard Day's Night-esque opening sequence of *Austin Powers*, to the Maharishi-aping misfire of *The Love Guru*, there's a personal connection

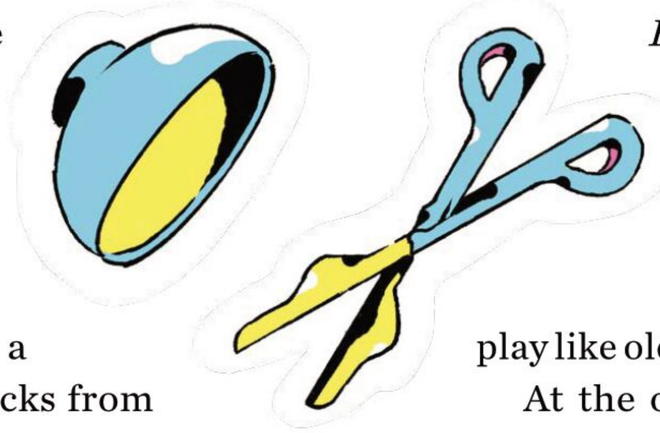
"BEAT FOR BEAT, THE BEATLES' STORY, ITS MAIN PLAYERS AND KEY SET PIECES, SEEM TO BE CARVED INTO THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY" HOUSEHOLD-NAME FAME..."

underneath it all, with Myers being the Canadian son of two Liverpudlian expats.

That emotional underpinning is in full effect in Richard Linklater's 2014 opus, *Boyhood*, when Ethan Hawke's divorcee dad, Mason Sr., presents his teenage son with a mixtape titled 'The Black Album', a thought experiment that culls choice tracks from Beatle solo efforts, to dream of where the band could have gone next. "Basically, I put the band back together for you," Mason Sr. explains. "Whenever you listen to too much of the solo stuff, it kind of becomes a drag, you know? But you put 'em next to each other, and they start to elevate each other..." The divorce parallels couldn't be more pronounced, especially considering the compilation's roots in real life: Hawke first put the playlist together for his daughter, Maya, following his separation from her mother, Uma Thurman.

Of course, not everyone finds meaning in the music of the Beatles, yet even they must recognise the sea change the band represented. When Terence Davies revisited the postwar Liverpool of his youth in the 2008 archive-doc essay film *Of Time and the City*, he recounted how all he valued in popular culture was "screamed away on a tide of Mersey Beat". Davies venomously whines "yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah" over Beatles footage, before delivering a withering parting shot when he describes the mop tops as being "not so much a musical phenomenon," but instead resembling, "a firm of provincial solicitors."

And yet there they are. Totemic, historic, unavoidable Beatles. A symbol of an era, a brand of quality, a byword for globe-conquering, household-name fame. Beat for beat, the band's story, its main players and key set pieces, seem to be carved into the collective memory, to the point where parodies can range from the hyper-specific to the knowingly off-brand. Eric Idle and Gary Weis' mockumentary *The Rutles: All You Need is Cash*, yet another 1978 release, renamed and reworked the Beatle myth for laughs, and came complete with a sublime set of tunes by pop-satirist Neil Innes: a faux best-of stuffed with pitch-perfect pastiches that play like old favourites reflected in a funhouse mirror.



At the other extreme, the 2007 mock-rock-doc *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story* has its protagonist meet the Beatles during their storied sojourn in India. Not only is the scene a sharp spoofing of the biopic genre's tendency for clanging namedrops, it also has fun with some wildly incongruous casting – Paul Rudd, Jack Black, Justin Long and Jason Schwartzman as John, Paul, George and Ringo, respectively, with barely a convincing accent between them.

The Beatles are omnipresent, but reassuringly so. The associated facts and figures, trivia and titles serve as a constant as times change. It's fitting, perhaps, that amid the home-invasion suspense of David Fincher's 2002 film *Panic Room*, Kristen Stewart's besieged teenager calms her nerves by reciting the band's US Capitol discography, album by album. There will always be Beatles in this world, which is why the likes of Richard Curtis and Danny Boyle can hang an entire film around the concept of imagining one without him.

That film's title, *Yesterday*, nods to how the Beatles have reached the level of a cultural lexicon, a shorthand where simple words and phrases can spark recognition and meaning. *Drive My Car* and *Norwegian Wood*, two screen adaptations from the work of Beatles nut novelist Haruki Murakami, likewise borrow titles for their associations – much like *Glass Onion*. If the last 60 years of pop culture history is a mystery, the four lads from Liverpool hold the key. The Beatles are all you need

LWLIES X EUROPEAN FILM ACADEMY PRESENTS…

EXPLORING THE EUROPEAN FILM ACADEMY

Looking at many ways this organisation celebrates film and creativity.

The European Film Academy is a body that provides tools for the promotion of and education about European filmmaking across 52 countries throughout the continent. Most may know the Academy for its annual award ceremony which celebrates the cream of filmmaking in Europe, but it is currently expanding its scope of work: the new "Month of European Film" is part of a more expansive project to spread a passion for European film as far and wide as possible. Here are just a few examples of the vital work the Academy is doing...

1

Hosting Europe's most spectacular movie award ceremony

This is the big one. A group of 40 pioneering European filmmakers, spearheaded by the Swedish maestro Ingmar Bergman, formed the European Film Academy in 1988, at the first ever presentation of the European Film Awards. Their objective: bridging the gap between cinematic artistry and the film industry by taking a love for a wide range of European cinema and opening it up to the public, while also making sure that European films don't disappear in cinemas.

This year, the Academy is honouring films and filmmakers via the Month of European Film, culminating in the annual awards ceremony. After an entirely virtual affair in 2020 and a hybrid event in 2021, the 35th European Film Awards ceremony will take place as an in-person celebration of filmmaking in Reykjavík, Iceland, with nominated titles being announced on 8 November 2022, with the event itself going down on 10 December.

2

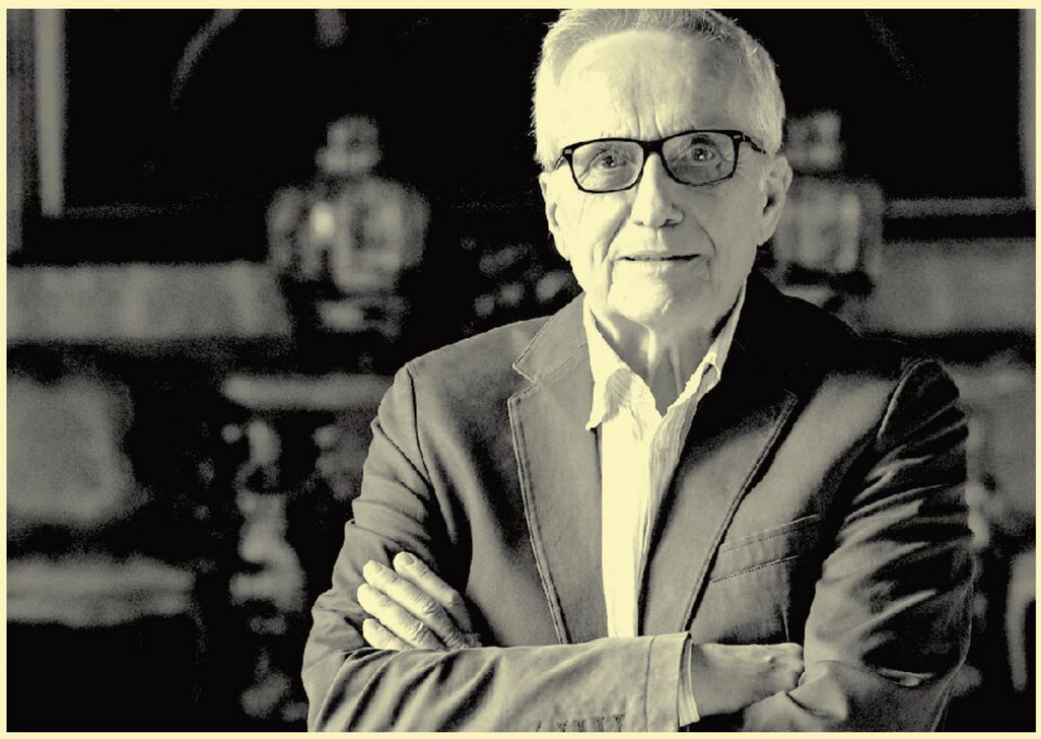
Bringing the best European cinema to the people

This year, the Academy has partnered with flagship cinemas and venues across 35 countries – from Iceland to Greece, Portugal to Romania, Latvia to the UK – to celebrate an eclectic and diverse selection of European films throughout the Month of European Film. Instead of presenting a uniform catalogue across all regions, each participating venue has had the freedom to explore and curate their own unique programme, combining screenings, talks, seminars, workshops and dedicated retrospectives. The celebration runs between 13 November and 10 December, and details of all titles and venues can be found at *monthofeuropeanfilm.eu*

3

Building cinematic monuments

The Academy's pan-European film heritage network has been steadily connecting film archives, cinematheques and institutions across the continent in order to increase public access to culturally diverse film histories and make them widely available to new audiences. On the occasion of the 35th Awards ceremony, 22 additional heritage locations have been unveiled, bringing the total number of Film Culture Treasure locations up to 35. Sites such as the Parisian Café des Deux Moulins (AKA Amélie's café), the marble-paved street of Stradun in Dubrovnik and The Notting Hill Bookshop join an ever-growing list of symbolic spaces including the Moulin d'Andé (a temple of Nouvelle Vague artistic creation), the Tabernas Desert (home turf of the Spaghetti Western) and the infamous Odessa steps, where Sergei Eisenstein's pioneering use of dialectical montage left its indelible mark.



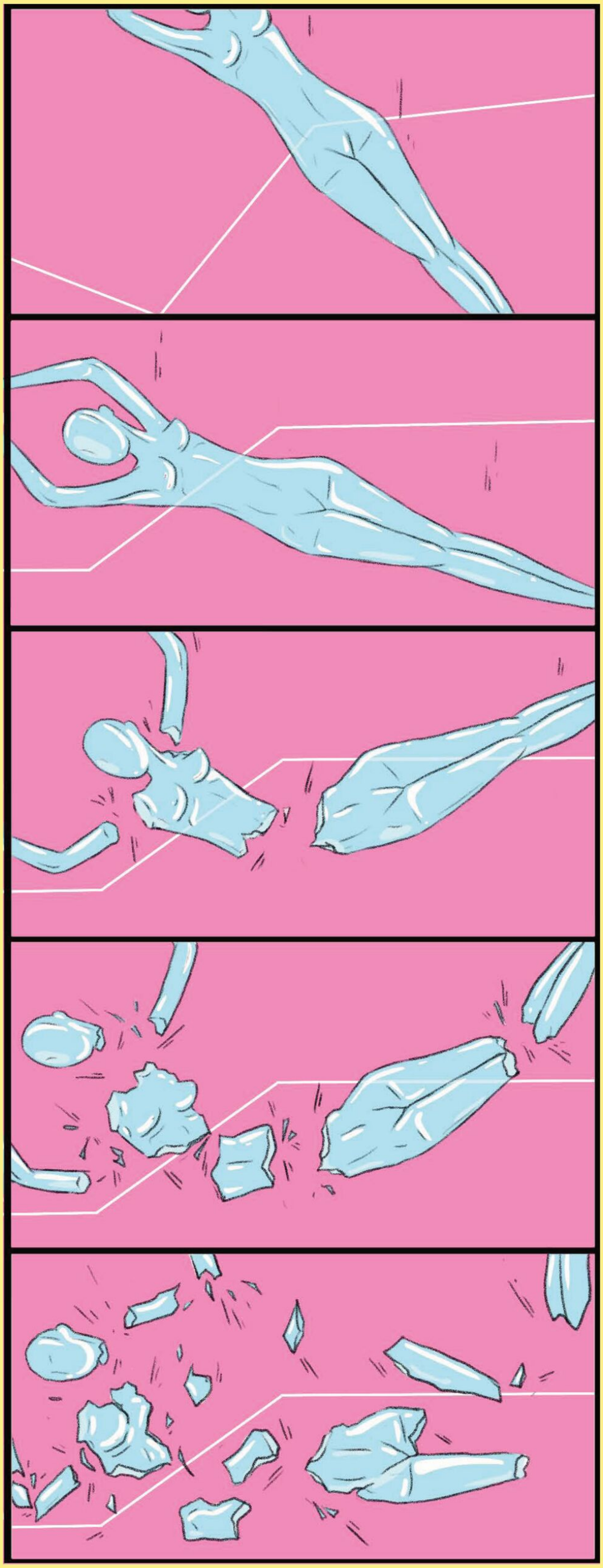
4

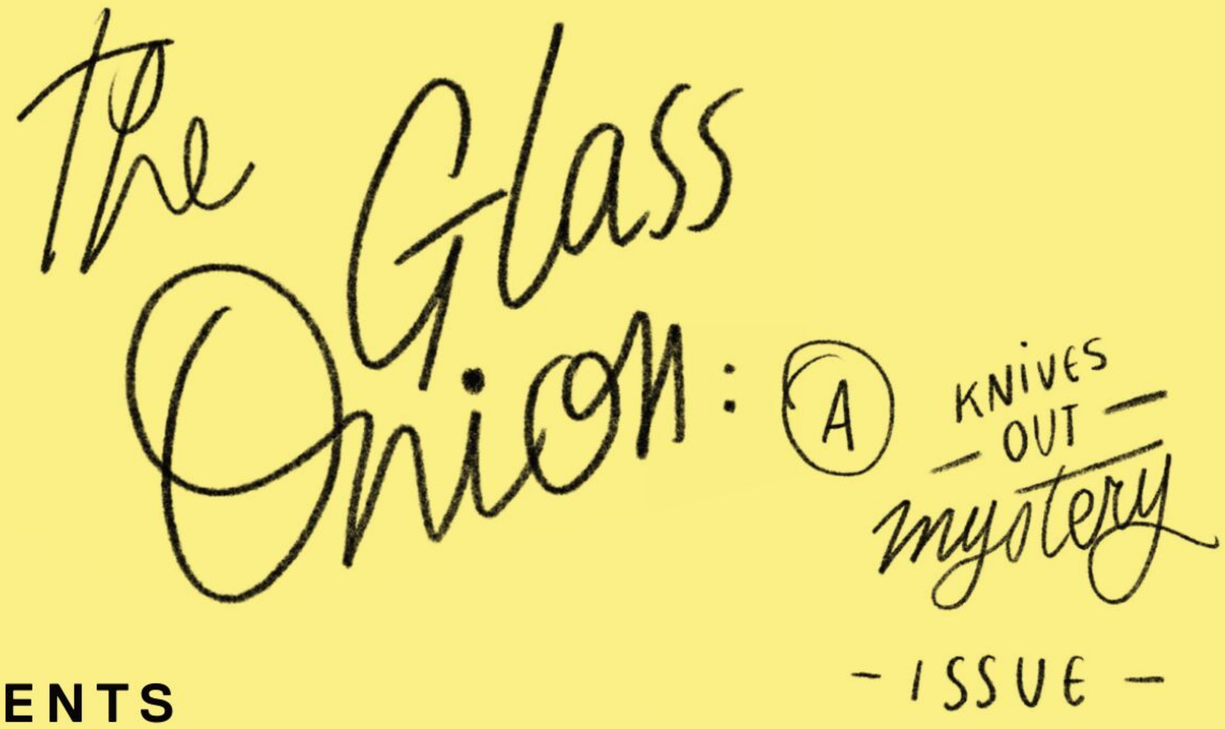
Paying homage to the masters

The great Palestinian auteur Elia Suleiman (*Introduction to the End of an Argument, Divine Intervention, It Must Be Heaven*) will be presented with the European Achievement in World Cinema Award for his outstanding and subversive and body of work. Suleiman – whose absurdist sensibilities draw frequent comparisons to Jacques Tati – has built a body of work that is distinctively and irrevocably charged with a Palestinian political fervour, and often displays the complexities that lie at the intersection of cultural politics and aesthetics.

A Lifetime Achievement Award will be awarded to the revered filmmaker and central figure of New German Cinema, Margarethe von Trotta (*The Second Awakening of Christa Klages, Marianne and Julianne, Rosa Luxemburg*). Foregrounding female subjectivities and a nuanced political agency, von Trotta's work as a filmmaker refracts history through fiction, and is imbued with poeticism, compassion, and incisive feminism. Italian master Marco Bellocchio will also be honoured for his groundbreaking work and receive the award for Innovative Storytelling, for his drama series *Exterior Night*. These awards will be presented during the ceremony in Reykjavik and all awardees will be present

To explore further, head to europeanfilmacademy.org





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Interview by **LEILA LATIF** Illustration by **STÉPHANIE SERGEANT**

Don Cheadle

The esteemed American character actor on music, activism, and why his role in White Noise *may have him stockpiling AK-47s.*

Don Cheadle's career has an unpredictability and idiosyncrasy that befits his foundation in jazz music. In his 40 years as a performer, he's done everything from award-winning biopics, to socially conscious documentaries, to playing Marvel superheroes. Throughout it all he grounds his performances in an old-school gravitas and uses his platform to speak about his values, be it stopping African genocides or protecting trans children. In Noah Baumbach's *White Noise*, he plays Professor Murray Siskind, who faces an "Airborne Toxic Event" while hoping to become the world's foremost authority on Elvis. We spoke to him about imposter syndrome, the business of Hollywood and vital doomsday prep.

LWLies: When you started out did you have a picture of the career you wanted to have? Cheadle: No. In high school I spent extracurricular time doing theatre, and I was pretty heavily into the jazz band – I played and I sang in a city-wide band. When I graduated, it was kind of a toss-up between pursuing theatre and pursuing jazz. And I made a weather choice and moved in with California. But it was also about what I thought I was going to really commit to and be able to do at a higher level, and music at that time was just a little too far out of my reach.

From that point, were there roles that you look back on as being pivotal? It just always feels like a house built on sand. I never felt like I 'made it'. Some people would say it would be *Devil in a Blue Dress*. Some people would say it was *Hotel Rwanda*, or the *Ocean's* movies or the Marvel franchise. But the experience from the inside is there's always this feeling of needing to hustle a little bit. I'm not trying to be coy or falsely modest or anything, but it's a neurotic business and I don't always play the game. When I graduated, I would leave and go do theatre during pilot season because I'd get to do Shakespeare or Fugard.

But it didn't make any sense for the business because you're supposed to hang around and try to get a pilot. So, I always had a counterintuitive thing with me and The Business. I was following things that I had a passion for, but conversely, that meant always wondering if you're on the right career path. It's only until very recently that I've been, like, 'I'm probably gonna be okay.'

Do the blockbusters facilitate passion projects like starring and directing in the Miles Davis film, *Miles Ahead*? There's an idea of 'one for them, one for me.' But it's still about, 'does this speak to me or not? And will it come together?' The first day of *Hotel Rwanda* my agent called me at lunch and goes, 'I just want to let you know there's no money in escrow for this movie so I can send you a ticket home.' But I was in South Africa and my kids are in school and we'd moved into a house. The producer floated the movie on credit cards for two weeks until the money started again. So even when you think it's happening, it may not be happening.

***Hotel Rwanda* aside, there's a clear thread of social conscience in your work. Where do you view the role of activism in art?** I think we're very privileged to have the opportunity for people, like in this interview, to be asked what we think. The job that we do requires us to promote and talk to the press and media and garner a certain amount of attention based on what we're doing, so I want to use that in accordance with my values.

I found myself thinking about *Hotel Rwanda* during *White Noise* – there's a similar question of in a crisis, would you become the hero, or would you flail? I think you do both, right? You flail and you see sometimes that you've got that hero in you. In *Hotel Rwanda* Paul wasn't thinking of trying to be a hero. I love that in the beginning he's just trying to keep his job. It was very personal, and then it became something bigger. And who is a hero in *White Noise*? The same person who saves their family might also try to kill somebody.

“I’m an American – I’m already supposed to have five AKs by now.”

The very specific tone of the film is set with an introduction which sees Murray lecturing about car crashes in American cinema. What did you want to come across? Murray is telling people how to process death, misery and violence, and I thought it was a very interesting and funny take on what it is that we were about to see. He is sort of the MC and I think when you listen to the words, it’s true. It’s supposed to be devoid of the emotion of what it’s really supposed to be depicting, and instead the car crash is a love letter to our ability to pull off spectacular things. It’s disjointed with the reality, which makes a lot of sense in a movie where everyone’s trying to figure out their emotions. What is the impact of emotions when everybody’s disconnected from their feelings?

You spoke at the beginning about the role of music in your life. There’s a scene in the film where you and Adam Driver face off with duelling diatribes on Hitler’s mother versus Elvis’s. Do you think your inherent musicality was key to that scene? I had to trust Noah as that scene was ultimately put together with what Danny Elfman did with the music: the way that it was then cut with real footage; the way that it was all the post work that was done on it. We had no idea about how it would play when we were doing it. We could read the script and we knew there was gonna be some intercut scenes of a train wreck. But we never heard the music for it and that’s what took that scene to another place. The juxtaposition of those images between the Elvis crowds and the Nazis – that really made it scary and very rich. That’s the great thing about movies: you have the opportunity to direct the movie again in the editing room.

It’s based on a 1985 book but really captured this current near-apocalyptic atmosphere. Did that speak to how you’ve been feeling? Yeah, it’s cyclical, right? We had these times where we felt like we were living in the best of times. And then 10 years later it feels like the last days. We’re in a cold war again and Ukraine, climate change, Covid, mid Covid, long Covid and present Covid. So, we’re right back in the sweet spot of what that movie was dealing with. I hope when people see it that they will feel that it’s a cool frame of reference for what they’re living through.

When you’ve done something that’s so much about confronting the fear of death, like *White Noise*, does that have any impact on your future plans? Well, I’ve started my bunker budget. I’ve started stockpiling weapons.

Wait, you only just started stockpiling weapons?! You are years behind most of us. I know I’m late to the game! I’m an American – I’m already supposed to have five AKs by now. But being serious, the piece rings that bell in a way that makes people introspective and thoughtful about it and come out of the other side not thinking we gotta, like, hit the mattresses and get ready to kill everybody. It asks you to start reflecting on what’s important, and not in a dissimilar way than when the pandemic started. You start to prioritise and really think about how you want to spend your time and what matters. Time is the one commodity that you can’t buy. The movie made me think about that again, but not in a different way, just as another additive to the idea, just another brick in the wall

Little White Lies

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White Noise

Directed by **NOAH BAUMBACH**
Starring **ADAM DRIVER, GRETA GERWIG, DON CHEADLE**
Released **25 NOVEMBER**

Noah Baumbach is – at least at first glance – a curious choice to adapt the work of American author Don DeLillo for the screen, as his stylised, complex and idiosyncratic prose seems vastly different from the realist dialogue that the filmmaker tends to favour in his portraits of contemporary American life. But the overarching theme of *White Noise* – an anxiety around the looming spectre of death – is familiar territory for for the writer/director, as is the psyche of the film's middle-aged, middle-class white protagonist. This is his most ambitious project in both scale and provenance.

This does seem apparent in the film's opening sequence. After Don Cheadle's cheerful academic Murray Siskind delivers a monologue on the optimistic overtones of the car crash in American cinema, we cut to preeminent Hitler Studies professor Jack Gladney (Adam Driver) and his wife Babette (Greta Gerwig) in their kitchen, surrounded by a gaggle of precocious children. They move through the space with a choreographed fluidity; they speak not so much like people, but like characters in a play.

There is something artificial and odd about the tableaux, with its densely saturated colours and Gerwig's frizzy bouffant hair. But this jarring sensation doesn't last, much in the way a euphoric high after a bout of unbridled consumerism is only ever a fleeting reprieve from the impending heat death of the universe. The rhythms of the film soon settle, and it becomes an offbeat, but not unwelcome, change of pace for Baumbach.

He retains the much of the anxious, wry spirit of DeLillo's prose, but trims down many of the side plots and asides which give 'White Noise' such character. Purists might be offended, but it works in the favour of keeping pace. Shot during the summer of 2021, it seems inevitable that comparisons will be drawn between the events of this film and the Covid-19 pandemic: onlookers theorise about the causes and effects of the health crisis; masks are worn; Jack and Babette find vastly different ways through their anxieties around death. But the strength of the source material (and indeed Baumbach's execution) make *White Noise* one of the better examples of 'pandemic art' to emerge from this perilous time in history.

There's sympathy here for how fucked up everything is. Baumbach doesn't pretend that he has the answers for what we do now, as we emerge blinking and yawning into a world where we can't afford to heat our homes. Sometimes death seems like a better option – a bypassing of the bullshit, so to speak.

But there are brief glimmers of a world worth sticking around for: the tenderness of love; the pleasures of parenthood. *White Noise* is a story about cutting through the static and learning to settle in silence. **HANNAH STRONG**

ANTICIPATION. 3
Unsure about the wigs here... There are lots and lots of wigs.

ENJOYMENT. 4
Wig fears unfounded. A charmingly gloomy film.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
Best closing credits sequence of the year.

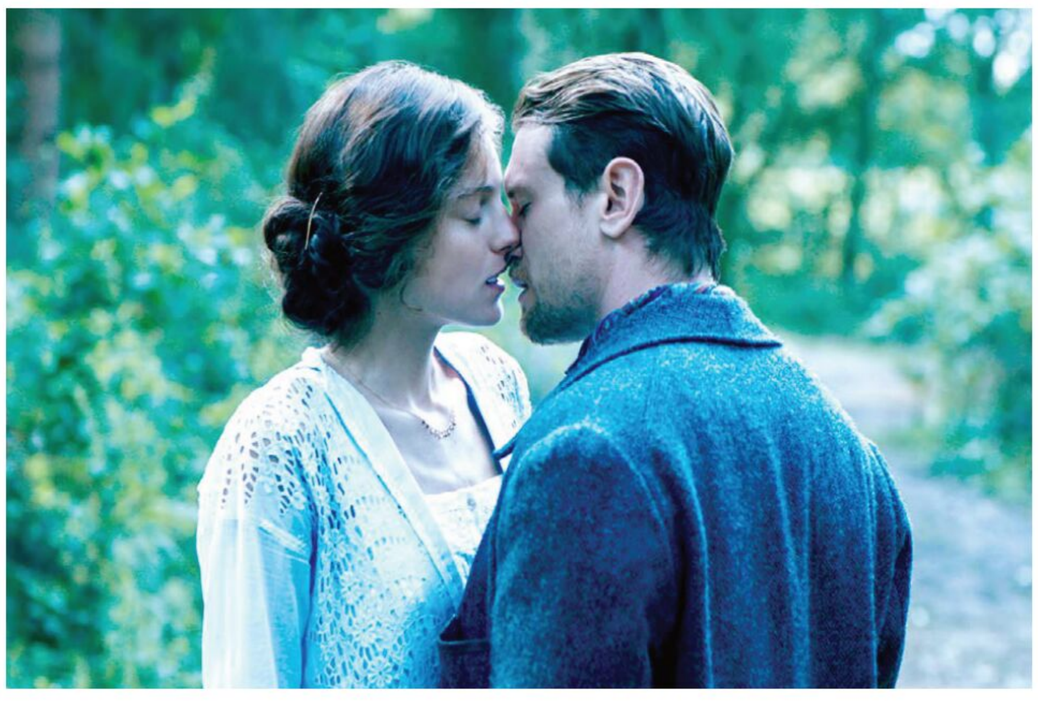
Lady Chatterley's Lover

Directed by **LAURE DE CLERMONT-TONNERRE**
Starring **EMMA CORRIN, JACK O'CONNELL, JOELY RICHARDSON**
Released **25 NOVEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
An interesting combo of director, stars and source material. Could go either way. **4**

ENJOYMENT.
Sex in film is back, baby. **4**

IN RETROSPECT.
One of the year's best/horniest period dramas. **4**



A successful adaptation of DH Lawrence's scandal-courting 1928 novel, 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' requires a subtle alchemy. On paper this tale of untrammelled libido triumphing over 20th century class barriers seems easily achievable. The novel's once-taboo nature – it was unpublished for three decades before being subject to a lengthy obscenity trial and bans around the world – has often worked against it, and adaptations of Lawrence's gripping drama often reduce it to bodice-ripping smut. What distinguishes Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre's newest interpretation from its predecessors is its deft, mature understanding of what makes both Lady Chatterley and her lover tick.

The novel is built on the sexual tension between Lady Chatterley – an unhappy, newly-wed wife of a baronet – and Oliver Mellors, the rugged gamekeeper who stalks her husband's isolated country estate. De Clermont-Tonnerre has found two excellent actors to ensure that the sexual tension is as taut as possible, even though it gradually slackens over the film's two-hour shy runtime. Jack O'Connell hasn't been given a role as meaty as this since Yann Demange's 2014 film *'71* and he makes for a note-perfect Mellors. He is both physically and emotionally convincing, conveying the man's intellectual curiosity and virility without ever descending into caricature. The same can't be applied to his woodland cottage, which comes off more as a rustic Airbnb than a functioning gamekeeper's residence.

In their first starring role after a Golden Globe-winning, turn as Princess Di in Netflix' behemoth, *The Crown*, Emma Corrin makes for a compelling lead – indeed, on this evidence they have cemented their status as a complete star. Corrin's screen roles to date have all been 20th century heterosexual women in dysfunctional marriages, and this is perhaps their most nuanced performance to date. By homing in on the humanity of Lady Chatterley, referred to here as Connie, and transcending the stuffiness of the period setting, Corrin breathes new life into the character. Connie is a modern woman, and this is achieved without David Magee's script succumbing to the desire to awkwardly transpose contemporary feminist ideals onto her.

If the film falls short in any area, it's in its failure to fully embrace the novel's deeper themes. The surge of industrialisation plays a key role in differentiating Lord and Lady Chatterley, him being rapt by technological advances and her being enamoured with the beauty of nature. The director pays lip service to these ideas without ever engaging with them as key components to Lawrence's narrative. And not to put too fine a point on it, but the sex is incredible. Cinema has been deprived of eroticism recently, on-screen sex has become a depressing rarity, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is restorative. It's graphic; it's sensual; it's incessant; it's everything Lawrence wrote it to be. Two actors going at it committedly on screen shouldn't feel this unusual, but this refreshing film understands that, to quote *Eyes Wide Shut*, there's something very important that we need to do as soon as possible. **PATRICK SPROULL**

Return to Dust

Directed by **LI RUIJUN**
Starring **WU RENLIN, HAI QING,**

Released **16 SEPTEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
A respectable response from when it premiered at the 2022 Berlin Film Festival. **3**

ENJOYMENT.
Very slow and detailed, but comes together beautifully in the end. **3**

IN RETROSPECT.
It's a film which is making the right people angry. **4**

Draconian censorship laws in China mean that it's rare to see films that criticise the pristine mother nation. Li Ruijun's *Return to Dust* is an intriguing case, as it was initially deemed acceptable for cinemas, but was eventually pulled and banned for the crime of depicting rural life in China in a drastic and forbidding light. Acknowledging hardscrabble poverty, it seems, is a big no-no.

It's a sad state of affairs to have government mechanisms in place to suppress any form of art and expression, but in this case it feels particularly egregious as writer/director Li Ruijun appears to have gone to great pains to play by the crooked rules. His intimate, slow-burn drama opens on a marriage of convenience, though it is not necessarily convenient for the two parties being bonded in matrimony, rather than it is for their families.

Guiying (Hai Qing) is a middle-aged woman deemed to be past her reproductive prime and who suffers from various chronic ailments including incontinence. Youtie (Wu Renlin) is a taciturn farm worker who just accepts his stale lot in life with unblinking neutrality. The pair, who are used to surviving on the most meagre of means, develop a partnership which evolves, very gradually, from passive business relationship to something like almost looks like love, though it is a love expressed through action rather than reaction. The story takes place on the arid and unforgiving planes situated in the Gansu region of northwestern China – 2019 data suggests that it is officially the poorest region in the country. As a metaphor for this burgeoning, barely-visible romance, Youtie and Guiying pull their threadbare socks up and decide to create a little piece of paradise for themselves. We are then shown, in painstaking detail, the process of building a mud hut, including the creation of each red-brown "brick".

The backbreaking trails of life as depicted in this film clearly gave the censors the heebie-jeebies, and the pair's exertions yield only meagre rewards. And if that wasn't enough, Youtie is literally being bled dry by a local businessman who requires regular transfusions of his rare blood type, though our hero sternly rejects the gifts they attempt to force on him. Though politics are never discussed directly, the film is implicitly critical of a system which has no idea of how its people actually live and what they need to survive. In one bitterly comic scene, the couple are relocated to a newbuild apartment block, and have trouble understanding how they're able to cohabit with their essential livestock, including cinematic flavour of the month, a donkey.

Despite these subtle barbs, *Return to Dust* ends up as an elegiac love story as the unlikely couple form a bond built on a foundation of total understanding and empathy. The pacing of the drama can sometimes test the patience, yet its climactic chapter pays off on the laconic build-up.

DAVID JENKINS

Armageddon Time

Directed by JAMES GRAY
Starring MICHAEL BANKS REPETA, ANNE HATHAWAY, ANTHONY HOPKINS
Released 18 NOVEMBER

In a 1980 interview on televangelist Jim Bakker's network, then-presidential candidate Ronald Regan claimed, "We may be the generation that sees Armageddon." He was referring to concerns over the threat of a nuclear war, but the phrase looms large in James Gray's *Armageddon Time* (named for the Willie Williams' reggae song of the same name) taking on meaning beyond the advent of political superpowers. For an 11-year-old boy growing up in New York City, armageddon is: conflict with a teacher; a father's belt wielded as a weapon; and the declining health of a beloved grandfather. The end of the world is constantly on the horizon when you're a child.

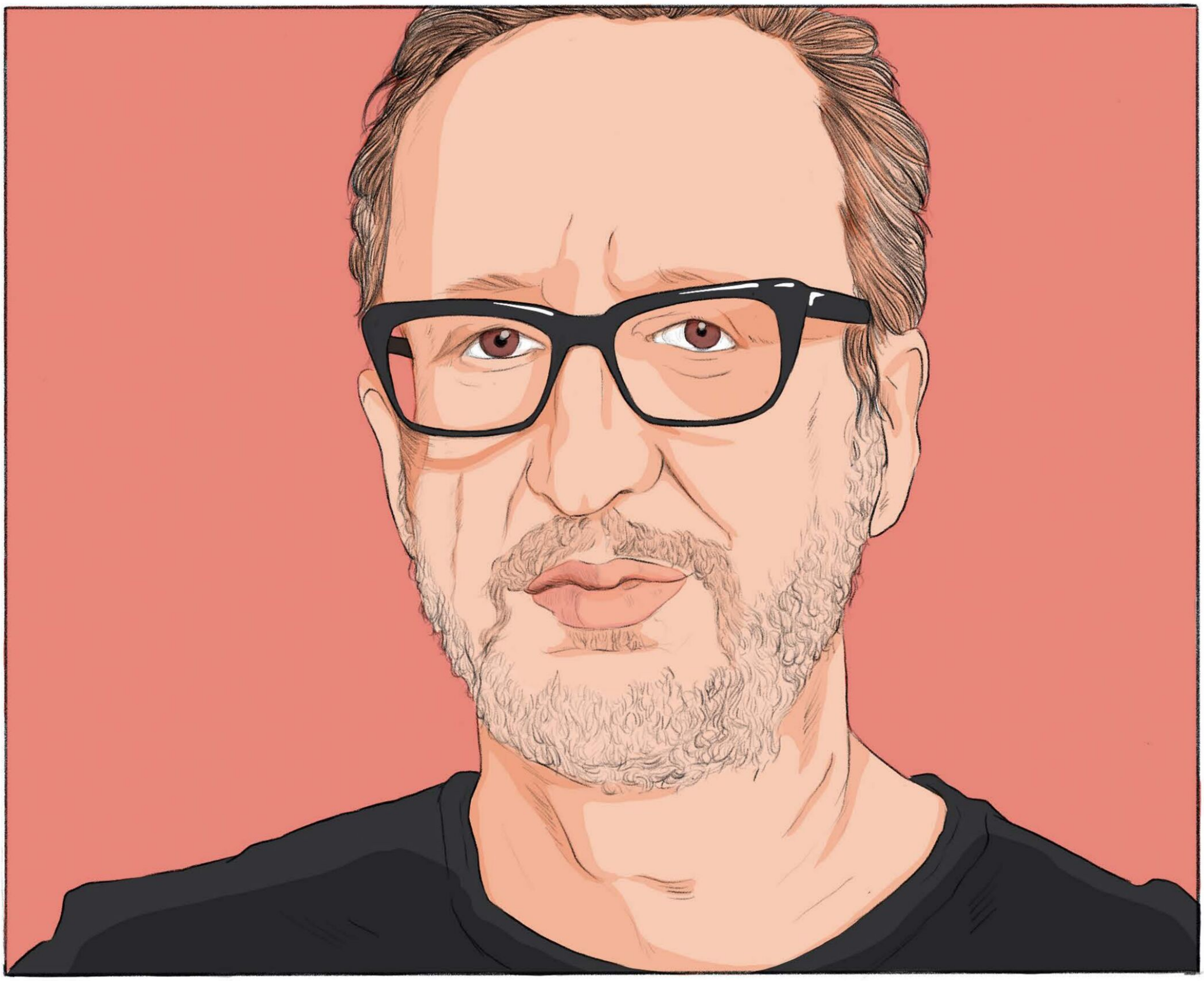
Paul Graff (Michael Banks Repeta) is a stand-in for Gray, a sixth-grader with his head in the clouds, more interested in drawing superheroes and acting as class clown than knuckling down. He forms a friendship with fellow dreamer Johnny (Jaylin Webb) who harbours ambitions of working for NASA and is similarly penalised by their teacher, as the only Black student in their class. Paul's scattiness and disinterest in school causes tension between his parents Esther (Anne Hathaway) and Irving (Jeremy Strong) who rely on the close relationship between Paul and his kindly grandfather Aaron (Anthony Hopkins) to get through to their younger son. Aaron encourages his grandson's creativity and ambition, but as tensions mount within the family and Paul struggles to navigate the rough terrain of adolescence, dreams aren't enough to subside on. Reality is harsh, disruptive and often cruel, and no-one feels this more than Johnny, who lives in poverty with his frail grandmother and knows how stacked against him the system is. But for a brief few moments, the friendship between him and Paul presents the possibility of escape from everything they're afraid of.

It's a melancholy study of child psychology and the way in which our formative years are marked by rapid periods of learning and relearning. Paul is granted clemency and is allowed to make mistakes. No such grace exists for Johnny, who realises the system is rigged, even if it's nice to pretend otherwise. Johnny is ultimately betrayed at the point when it matters most, with Paul rejecting his grandfather's advice to "be a mensch" and stand up for those that need it most. There's no absolution for the young child, who has to live with the guilt of what he did to his friend, and the realisation that the hard thing and the right thing are often the same. This element of the story is its most thorny: filmmakers have been making questionable art about their own white guilt for decades, but the mistakes we make as children do have the power to echo through our lives. Gray's honest and intimate cine-memoir understands the past is a foreign country, and not one you can live in forever. **HANNAH STRONG**

ANTICIPATION. 4
A new James Gray film is always a major event.

ENJOYMENT. 4
Articulate, unflinching and sometimes unflattering.

IN RETROSPECT. 5
A melancholy marvel from one of our finest cine-memoirists.



Interview by **HANNAH STRONG** Illustration by **STÉPHANIE SERGEANT**

James Gray

The director of Armageddon Time *on the tremendous emotional rewards of inner and outer reflection.*

A profoundly honest filmmaker, James Gray frequently takes inspiration from his own life and his family's history to create moving portraits of contemporary American life. In his latest drama, *Armageddon Time,* Gray reflects on being an 11-year-old in the late '70s, as Ronald Reagan's premiership loomed in the near distance and tensions flared between communities in New York City.

LWLies: The close relationship you had with your grandfather very much inspired this film. Why do you think the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren can be such a source of creative nurturing for children? Grey: My parents really struggled with putting food on the table, particularly in 1977. They had an extremely difficult time, needed government assistance with food stamps, and they were quite humiliated by that. I remember, my grandparents had retired at the most opportune moment. They didn't make a lot of money, they were both teachers, but they had saved and so and lived frugally, so they had some money. I think so much of my father and mother's anguish was about trying to make sure the family could function on a daily basis, the struggle to survive, and the expressions of love and tenderness, empathy, sympathy – those things couldn't really take hold when the struggle was daily, and so heavy.

I think you get something like a do-over as a grandparent. You already know what to do. Part of what the grandparent gives you is love without judgement and the pressures of the daily raising of the child. When you're a kid, you only have to have one person who says you're wanted and loved. That can be enough to save you. And for me it was him. I think grandparents, they have the benefit of a little distance and a little experience.

How do you choose what details to include and what to omit when drawing from family history? Wasn't it Hitchcock who said that movies are life with the boring parts cut out? I remember I asked Paul Thomas Anderson once, if he did outlines and he said, 'No, I don't ever outline. I make lists.' I thought to myself, 'What? A list is an outline.' So you make lists, you make an outline – I wrote down maybe 200 or so scenes or episodes from my life – and then you try to find the ones that are the most dramatically important. The ones that actually change the direction.

At the Venice Film Festival, Paul Schrader talked about how his view on the world has changed since he began making films, and he said, "Now I never wanna leave the room without saying I love you," which I thought was a beautiful way of articulating it. How has your worldview changed since you started making art? Well, I'm not at the same place of my life that Paul Schrader is, and it's very hard for me to have enough distance to be able to answer that with clarity. But do you know Hokusai, the Japanese printmaker? He had a great quote, and I'd like to read it to you. [Gray asks the PR for his phone.]

During the lockdown, my son would take me out to the backyard to look at insects. I was moved to tears almost all the time by it, in a way that shocked me. I was reading about Hokusai, but I didn't fully understand this quote until I was locked down, until I spent time with my children. Until I started to get older and my mortality became ever more clear to me. And I'd like to read this to you: "From the age of six, I had a passion for copying the form of things. And since the age of 50, I have published many drawings. Yet of all I drew by my 70th year, there is nothing worth taking into account. At 73 years, I partly understood the structure of animals, birds, insects and fishes, and the life of grass and plants. And so at 86, I shall progress further. At 90, I shall even further penetrate their secret meaning and by 100 I shall perhaps truly have reached the level of the marvellous and divine. When I am 110, Each dot each line possess a life of its own."

I guess the reason I'm reading this is because the older I get, the less I understand about the world. And the more heartbreak I feel on a daily basis, and maybe it means I should take a pill or something. But The Beatles had it right. I think it's advancing age. It's my father's death. It's the lockdowns. It's my children that have been born. You lose the anger. And you realise more the importance of achieving a feeling of love

LITTLE WHITE LIES. RECOMMENDS.

What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?

Directed by **ALEXANDRE KOBERIDZE**
Starring **ANI KARSELADZE**
GIORGI BOCHORISHVILI
Released **25 NOVEMBER**

"Some people think football is a matter of life and death," Bill Shankly, Liverpool's famed former manager, once said. "I don't like that attitude. I can assure them it is much more serious than that." Football has long been a sport for dreamers and in Georgian filmmaker Alexandre Koberidze, Shankly may have found another ally. In *What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?*, set in the bustling city of Kutaisi on the Rioni River, the game is watched or played on every street corner. Even the local stray dogs, one named Vardy no less, have their favourite viewing spots.

Koberidze's second feature is a sweepingly romantic portrait of the Georgian city and the love – between people and for football – that is its lifeforce. Shot on beautiful, textured 16mm and scored with elegant classical music composed by the director's brother, the film is tightly constructed in form – shot to shot, there is a ritualistic precision to the images of Kutaisi life. Whether its shoes, glassware, football shirts or the local cheese bread, khachapuri, the filmmaker uses close-ups to centre the quotidian and observe its mundane beauty.

Yet in narrative terms the film is loose and floating, inviting dreamlike lapses in concentration over its 151-minute runtime and employing a whimsical, folkloric logic to its driving love story. Lisa (Ani Karseladze) and Giorgi (Giorgi Bochorishvili), the film's central characters, fall for each other at first sight and are then immediately torn apart by a curse that changes their faces overnight. Their proposed date never happens, despite both of them waiting for the other at the elected cafe, because they simply don't recognise each other. Giorgi also loses his footballing ability, while Lisa can no longer practice as a pharmacist. Each then seeks a new way of life, with Giorgi working metres from Lisa and their fragmented romance finding a new way to repair itself. In his idyllic city symphony, Koberidze celebrates the serendipity of fate and the rhythms of daily life that bring together what is meant to be.

It's hard not to be wooed by this playful film that, among other things, sets a montage of children playing a scrappy game of football to 'Notti Magiche,' the official song of Italia 90, and asks the audience to close their eyes on screen when the curse is about to take effect. The film ebbs and flows through the everyday with these moments of magic peppered throughout.

So while World Cup fever kicks off in the city and the sporting dreamers take their seats, the two lovers find their path together. Football *is* a matter of life and death, but so is walking in the park, watching the river rush by or hanging the washing out to dry. It's everything and nothing, as easy as breathing, and in Koberidze's world it all makes perfect sense. **CAITLIN QUINLAN**

ANTICIPATION. 4
A festival favourite from a bright new talent.

ENJOYMENT. 4
Infectiously charming and beautifully told.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
I could bask in Koberidze's wonderful little world for far longer.

71st Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
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FAR EAST FILM FESTIVAL
AUDIENCE AWARD

"Tender love story... thought-provoking with beautifully judged performances"
DEADLINE

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

tiff

★★★★★
EASTERN KICKS

★★★★★
TOTAL FILM

★★★★★
THE UPCOMING

★★★★★
SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

Return to Dust 隐入尘烟

AN UNLIKELY LOVE STORY

FILM BY
LI RUIJUN

WU RENLIN
HAI QING

IN CINEMAS NOV 4

modernfilms.com/returntodust

Modern Films

Living

Directed by **OLIVER HERMANUS**
Starring **BILL NIGHY, AIMEE LOU WOOD, TOM BURKE**
Released **4 NOVEMBER**

A man should never be forced to underplay the final moments of his life. The news of sudden illness deserves the highest level of drama and despair, as time begins to slip through your fingers. Yet there is such piercing vulnerability in the delicacy with which Bill Nighy plays Mr Williams, a Big Smoke pencil pusher forced to reckon with what life means before he draws his final breath.

He's not the first nor will he be the last man to reckon with his mortality, and it's a tall task to even consider retelling the story first put to screen by Akira Kurosawa in 1952 with *Ikiru*, itself based on Leo Tolstoy's 1886 novella 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich'. So *Living*, directed by South African filmmaker Oliver Hermanus and with a screenplay by Kazuo Ishiguro, doesn't necessarily shine by telling a peerless story – but the grace with which it is told and played is breathtaking.

Nighy's performance is so gentle and selfless that, despite the bustle of this 1950s metropolis orbiting around his life, so much of the film spotlights the young professionals learning from his wisdom and somehow trying to understand that life ends and keeps moving at the same time. Aimee Lou Wood, star of Netflix comedy series *Sex Education*, infuses great sensitivity into the male-heavy office as Margaret. There is wonder in her eyes as a knickerbocker glory is laid down for her pleasure, standing out as one of the most beautiful details in a film full of them.

Alex Sharp and Tom Burke, too, deliver fine work as colleagues and apprentices of Williams, yet this is Nighy's film, and his impact is felt even when he's nowhere to be seen. But when he is, it's all the more stunning, not least down to cinematographer Jamie D Ramsay's striking visuals which pay homage to '50s melodramas, with colours so vivid it feels like it's too good to be true and will snap back to reality at any moment. The design of *Living* adds so much love and pain to Williams' story, with Emilie Levienaise-Farrouch's impressionistic orchestral bolstering things further as it offers nods to countless pioneering classical musicians. It's in the craft where so much of the film's beauty lies: lived-in yet singular, familiar but quietly spectacular.

The question of what it means to be alive has fascinated countless artists, with so many failing to capture the precious and often indescribable joy of those fleeting moments we're all chasing after. *Living*, somehow, does it. Not by reinventing the concept of mortality nor by sending someone off in a firework or puff of smoke. By quietly taking a step back, taking it all in, and finding magic in every person's being. And when it's time – by going gracefully. **ELLA KEMP**

ANTICIPATION. 3
Olivier Hermanus needs to do justice to two titans: Akira Kurosawa and Bill Nighy.

ENJOYMENT. 4
Somehow more beautiful than anything could have suggested.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
Melodrama like they don't make anymore. A poignant swan song and gorgeous celebration of life.

Pinocchio

Directed by **GUILLERMO DEL TORO, MARK GUSTAFSON**
Starring **GREGORY MANN, EWAN MCGREGOR, CATE BLANCHETT**
Released **9 DECEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
A long gestating passion project backed by incredible craftspeople. **4**

ENJOYMENT.
Better to be a wooden boy than a fascist. **5**

IN RETROSPECT.
As strange and macabre as it is heartfelt. **5**

Becoming a real boy isn't something that crosses the mind of Pinocchio, in Guillermo del Toro's new adaptation of Carlo Collodi's books. This Pinocchio is only concerned with being a "good" boy. Del Toro – in his first animated film as director – along with co-director Mark Gustafson (animation director on *Fantastic Mr Fox*) and co-writer Patrick McHale (of *Over the Garden Wall* fame) explore this seemingly simple question over various adventures as Pinocchio wanders the country in search of the answer, and the story is updated to Mussolini's Italy. A number of father figures – including a crooked carnival owner and a fascist Podestá – try to teach him that being "good" means blind obedience, either at the service of creating capital or killing Italy's enemies. To Geppetto, it means obedience to the spirit of his departed son Carlo, with Pinocchio's creation occurring as an effigy made in drunken grief.

The resulting gnarled and asymmetrical puppet design of the wooden boy already stands apart from previous, softer adaptations but the rest impresses just as much: Geppetto himself looks as though he was carved from an old tree. Del Toro and Gustafson's production design favours painted backdrops and clockwork facial animation rather than face replacement and CG touch-up, giving the whole film a handmade quality, which feels apt for a story starring a carpenter. *Pinocchio*'s return to more traditional techniques is a breath of fresh air, as it relishes the slowness and tactility of the medium. The acting conducted by the animators emphasises slip-ups and stumbles and moments that don't really "mean" anything other than a pause between actions, something del Toro has credited to his love of Hayao Miyazaki (who directed *Porco Rosso,* a fairy tale about bodily transformation set against a backdrop of Italian fascism.)

Both known for their frequently disturbing spins on fairy tales and classical storybook structure, del Toro and McHale are a heaven-made match. Pinocchio's journey frequently mixes things up between the horrific creatures of del Toro's past and the whimsical but spooky animal people of McHale's work. But it's not so strange that it sheds its humanity – if anything this might be one of del Toro's weepiest movies, as Pinocchio's immortal life brings with it significant emotional burden.

There many digressions from the famous 1940 Disney adaptation, but also fascinating points of commonality. Instead of being blessed with a mortal life, Pinocchio learns the bittersweetness of how brief it is, and how that brevity shouldn't be wasted on trying to fit within strict categorisation from parent and state alike. The Disney version warns of disaster and moral degeneracy in the absence of authority. But del Toro's film loves disobedience. He draws lines between abusive fatherhood and fascism, as Pinocchio meets various children also blindly trying to please their fathers at all costs. By changing the cautionary tale to be against assimilation and categorisation, plus its invigorating update of traditional technique, the film carves out a space not just as the best *Pinocchio* film of this year, but among the finest films the director has made. **KAMBOLE CAMPBELL**

Triangle of Sadness

Directed by **RUBEN ÖSTLUND**
Starring **HARRIS DICKINSON, CHARLBI DEAN, WOODY HARRELSON**
Released **OUT NOW**

ANTICIPATION.
All aboard the good ship Östlund!

4

ENJOYMENT.
Stomach-churning scenes abound.

4

IN RETROSPECT.
A fun, but fairly smug, voyage.

4

There's something about the idea of floating on the open sea with a bunch of strangers that feels vaguely ominous, and given the reputation cruises have as breeding grounds for stomach bugs and potential death traps, it's surprising we don't see more films that take place abroad them. Good news, then, for anyone who ever read David Foster Wallace's 'A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again' and felt seen – Ruben Östlund shares your apprehension about ocean-based holidays. The latest brash provocation from the director of *Force Majeure* and *The Square* concerns the passengers aboard a luxury cruise ship and charts the series of unfortunate events that throw them into disarray. The self-avowed Marxist captain, Thomas (Woody Harrelson), is drunk, a storm is closing in, and there are some unsavoury-looking characters lurking on a passing boat.

Nevertheless, jobbing model Carl (Harris Dickinson) and his influencer girlfriend Yaya (Charlbi Dean) are making the most of a free holiday. Their fellow passengers include a Russian manure entrepreneur (Zlatko Burić) and a German woman who's recently suffered a stroke rendering her unable to say anything except the words "In den Wolken". If Carl and Yaya feel out of place, this is superseded by a lingering argument about their relationship (which comprises the film's short opening chapter), in which Carl calls Yaya out for never paying for dinner when they're together. He expresses a desire to defy traditional gender roles within their relationship, though Yaya seems a little sceptical about the suggestion.

Luckily for them, circumstance leads to an immediate opportunity for some gender role reversal, as they soon find themselves shipwrecked and discover that the only competent member of their group is Abigail (Dolly De Leon), a Filipino toilet cleaner on the ship. Abigail, sick and tired of dealing with rude passengers, is heartily pleased to finally be the one in charge.

Östlund delights in juxtaposing his big political themes with toilet humour – the amount of vomit and faecal matter in this film really can't be understated – and the three-act structure leaves the film backloaded, as it is at its most enjoyable once the crew and guests are shipwrecked and start to live out an off-kilter version of 'Lord of the Flies'. Even if the storyline needs work, Östlund's visual creativity delights in a scene where the camera appears to move with the rocking of the ship on choppy waters.

Dickinson is superb as the idealistic but empty-headed Carl, who decides the best way to survive is to find someone to provide for him. Dickinson offsets his indisputable handsomeness by playing up Carl's crotchetiness – he's an expressive performer, and in the purse of his lips or furrow of his brow he can fill in the blanks between the lines of Östlund's broad-strokes script.

It's certainly an enjoyable watch, though Östlund gestures towards big questions about gender and class divisions without making any truly bold statements. Instead, his characters noodle around inside increasingly outlandish scenarios, and the eventual ending feels rather abrupt after two hours of build-up.

HANNAH STRONG

As told to **ELLA KEMP** Illustration by **STÉPHANIE SERGEANT**

Ruben Östlund

The two-time Palme d'Or winner and director of Triangle of Sadness *holds forth on his vision of an economic utopia.*

Arch provocateur Ruben Östlund has made a name for himself by pushing buttons and presenting audiences with awkward, often paradoxical moral dilemmas. His new film, *Triangle of Sadness*, is a film about the transitory nature of money and fame, and also the power of sudden revolution.

"I always want to ask people who watch my films: what is the political message? I've been completely uninterested in making films that support the left-wing socialist movement only. I think there's a lot of great things with the market economy and there are great things with regulated capitalism. When I was doing the film, I almost wanted to go into the world we were dealing with in the 1980s, when we had a Western perspective of the world and we had an Eastern perspective of the world.

The Western perspective is delivering capitalistic ideas; and the Eastern is the socialist/communist ideas. And for me, the captain in the film [played by Woody Harrelson] is not only an alcoholic, he is an idealist and a Marxist. So I thought it was like these two different ideologies have been bashing their head against each other. And I thought, haven't we left that behind us?

And now we can talk about how to really create a great society. So if you want to read something on how we should build a better society, I will recommend a book called 'Utopia for Realists' by Rutger Bregman. And he is talking about basic income. He explains how there was a garbage strike when he came to New York. They were striking for six days, and it was complete chaos. And he is comparing that strike with a strike in Ireland that was with the bankers. And they were 100 per cent certain that society would collapse.

But they were striking for six months and nothing happened. People were inventing their own currencies and stuff like that. I think that all of us agree that it's not okay to exploit other people. And it's not okay to pay them an unfair part of the profit. And if you look at Sweden during the '80s, social democracy actually managed to regulate capitalism in a quite good way, and we shared the responsibility of society at large.

But people have told me what's going on in the UK now... I get sad when I hear that. We have not been able to regulate real estate and housing, so young people have no place to live. And then it becomes absurd, because the market economy is helping us in many ways. But if it becomes unregulated, then it's not helping us anymore, then people get a poorer situation where they are trying to live. And that can't be the idea of how the economy should be run. So there are obvious things where I feel a free market and unregulated capitalism is not helping us. It's simple.

Since women are always paid less money than men, women become more concerned about how they are paid when they get into the film industry. Many men going into the film industry don't have any problem working for free for a couple of years, because they don't have this on their shoulders that they are not treated equally. I also think it's a burden for women who can't just go in like, 'This is a fun group of people, I really want to spend time with them,' without thinking about not being treated equally. I like to explore gender expectations and the way culture has trained us to behave, and how we're dealing with it. #MeToo was a great movement, but you also could do #IGotBilled, and the men could tell the stories about when they were treated like a wallet. But when I bring it up, the men just say: "I can't go there."

The Wonder

Directed by **SEBASTIÁN LELIO**
Starring **FLORENCE PUGH, NIAMH ALGAR, KÍLA LORD CASSIDY**
Released **2 NOVEMBER**

The opening titles of *The Wonder* are superimposed over the exterior framework of a studio set. The camera pans across an empty warehouse while a narrator asks us to remember the artifice of cinema when we enter its worlds, before landing on the room in which the story begins. The device comes from Emma Donoghue's 2016 novel of the same title, a far-cry from her 2010 claustrophobic thriller 'Room'.

Here that terrain is the Irish countryside to which we venture with Nurse Wright (Florence Pugh) to investigate a mysterious child called Anna (Kíla Lord Cassidy) who has supposedly gone without food for four months. The question of Anna's health in spite of starvation has led a panel of village elders to canonise the 11-year-old as a saint, persisting in their convictions even after Nurse Wright warns them the child may die. What ensues is a battle of religiosity and secularism as old as time.

The simplicity of the narrative allows those strands of argument to percolate effectively. In this sense, *The Wonder* feels akin to the desolate period dramas of Daphne du Maurier, especially 'Jamaica Inn'. Pugh and Cassidy make a captivating double act in the child's game of cat-and-mouse, well-accompanied by the lurking presence of Tom Burke's potentially devious journalist. It's a refreshing return to naturalistic form for Pugh following her recent blockbuster run, relishing in the multi-layered gowns designed by Odile Dicks-Mireaux.

But *The Wonder* is most captivating in its look – the misty green hues of Ireland filmed beautifully by cinematographer Ari Wegner. Her ability to capture the vastness of landscape earned her an Oscar nod for Jane Campion's *The Power of the Dog* (2021), using that scale again to capture a quietly terrifying sense of isolation. It's a shame that the terrain Wegner captures isn't left to stand on its own, occasionally pulling back to the film's opening trickery. It is surprising that such a literary framework has been retained in the screenplay, penned by Donoghue alongside Alice Birch, whose previous adaptations include Nikolai Leskov for William Oldroyd's 2016 film *Lady Macbeth*, and director Sebastián Lelio. Perhaps such postmodernist questioning is Lelio's way of keeping one foot in his more arthouse past, which earned him an Oscar for *A Fantastic Woman*.

We return to the studio at the end of *The Wonder*, now being reminded that we must come out of the cinematic world and return to our own. The result is jarring, leaving one incapable of suspending disbelief enough to fully enter the fabric of the screen. If that is the point, it is patronisingly obvious in a way that undermines the more compelling theological questions posed by the narrative proper.

LILLIAN CRAWFORD

ANTICIPATION. 3
Lelio swings from high to low in quality, but Florence Pugh comes alive in period drama.

ENJOYMENT. 4
The du Maurier-lite narrative by Emma Donoghue scintillates in the lush Irish countryside.

IN RETROSPECT. 3
Devices that work in books don't always translate well to film.

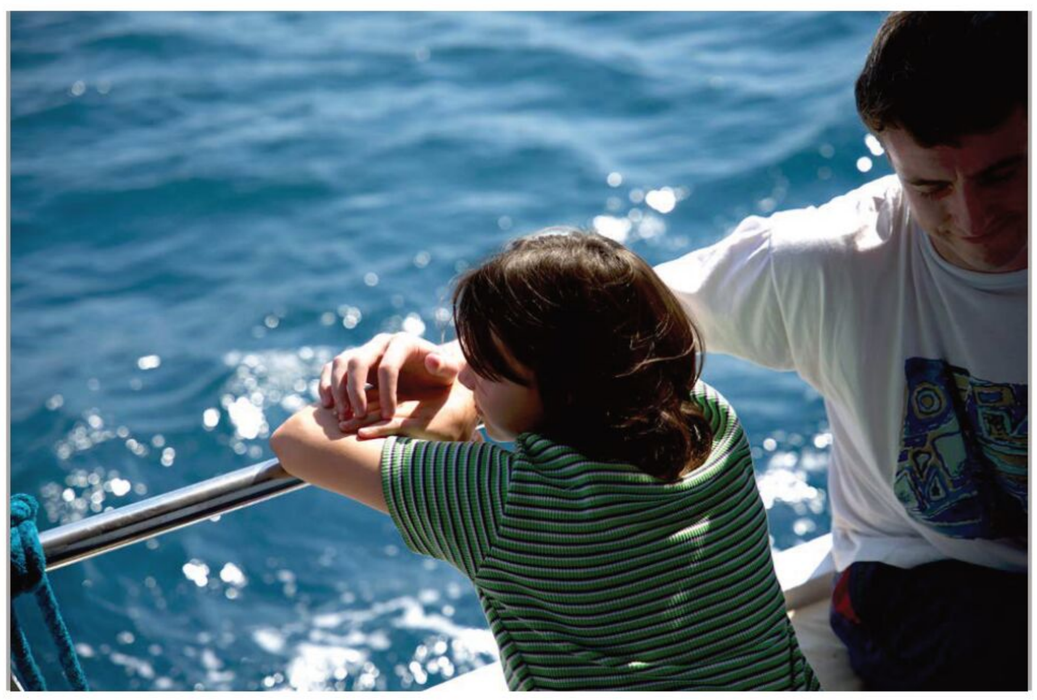
Aftersun

Directed by	**CHARLOTTE WELLS**
Starring	**PAUL MESCAL, FRANKIE CORIO, CELIA ROWLSON-HALL**
Released	**18 NOVEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
All we want to see is Paul Mescal in a dad role. **4**

ENJOYMENT.
Kleenex in hand, you'll want to call your parents asap. **5**

IN RETROSPECT.
An ode to cinema as a machine for remembering. **5**



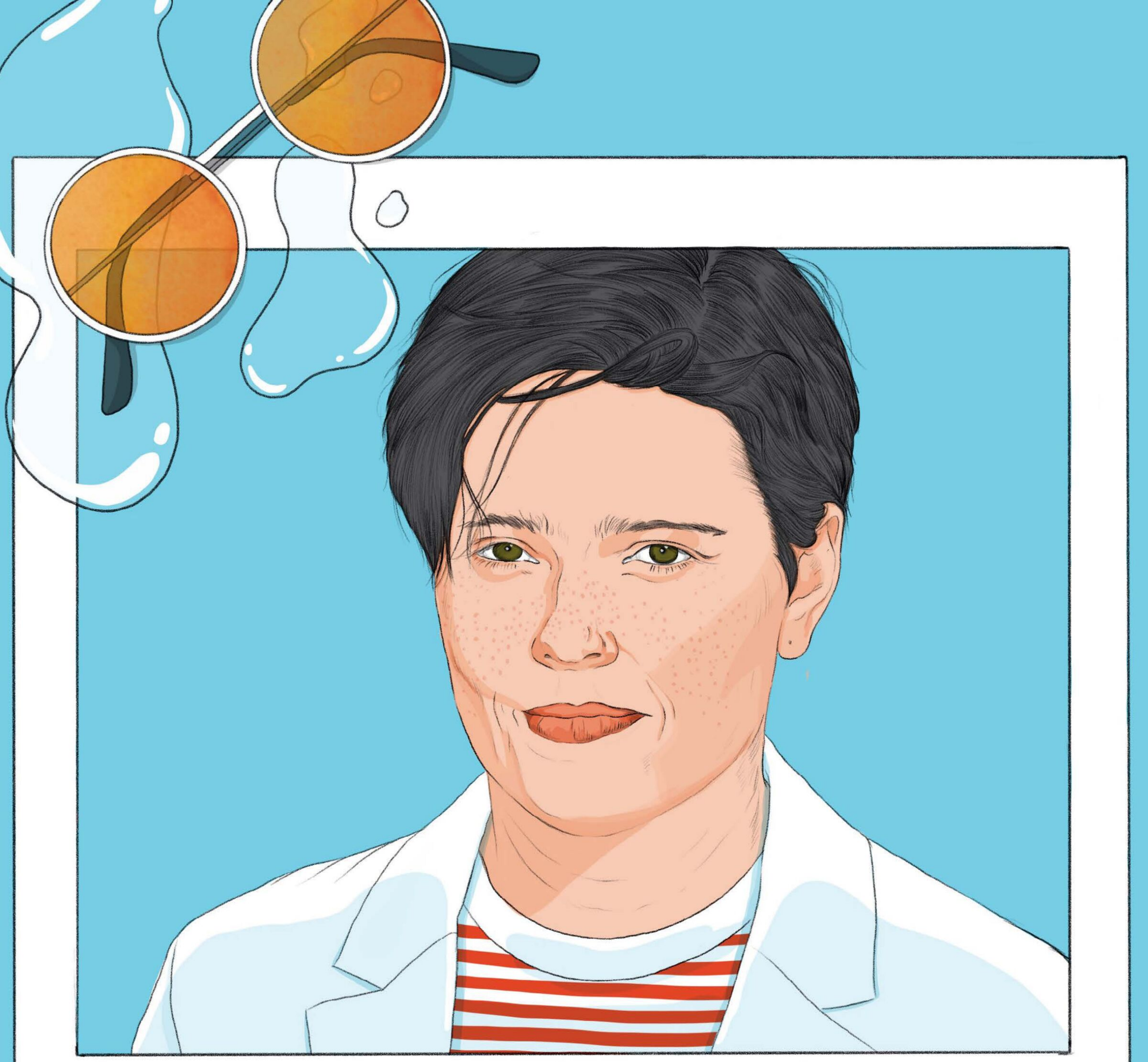
How does one say goodbye to a memory? By unearthing its immense power, typically tucked away in a fragment of a whole, and letting the camera roll. Scottish director Charlotte Wells locates the answer somewhere in the expansive emotional world of *Aftersun*, her feature debut. The film transforms a week into an eternity as Calum (Paul Mescal) and his 11-year old daughter, Sophie (newcomer Frankie Corio) reunite for their annual package holiday on the Turkish coast, armed with a camcorder to capture it all. Between the bright blues skies and the peachy-pink hues of sun-soaked skin, time allows for so much, that we can almost see moments becoming memories.

Eleven is the age when the distance between children and parents grows into a chasm, and *Aftersun* dwells precisely in that ever-deepening rift. Even when negotiating the process, father and daughter seem to possess an affective synergy, a reassurance beyond wordiness emanates from the way Sophie anticipates his worry and muffles "I'm fine" without even looking up. While their conversations could be considered brisk, they also fold in the silences that bookend a line of dialogue. In fact, the film is so attentive to its tonal shifts that it offers a typology of silences: caring, hesitant, embarrassed, but never the same one twice.

There is an urge to make time last also in the way cinematographer Gregory Oke almost always frames Sophie together with Calum in a medium or close up shot, their boundaries exposed now porous, then – hardening. But when observing Calum on his own, the camera retreats, allowing only a view that is obstructed, reflected, or from afar – as if melancholy glues together the person and the memory. For Sophie, her dad feels close and yet unknowable – he may dance, do tai chi, and come up with fun activities – but his inner world remains a mystery save for such manifestations, rendered raw through Mescal's performance of toppling stoicism. *Aftersun* gives all its love to a past reimagined, as it punctures the present.

Throughout the film, one scene cuts through the summer slowness repeatedly, and with an arresting beat. Fragments of a rave appear in between the strobe lights cues, to reveal an older woman (supposedly Sophie) dancing, her gaze wandering in the crowd. As the sequence bleeds into the 'past' timeline with a hypnotic use of 'Under Pressure', its liminal space – is it real? Is it a dream? – aligns remembering with reinventing, their superimposition a metaphor for the whole film as a play on reimagining the other.

In a way, the whole of *Aftersun* plays out in reverse in its first four minutes when we see a tape being rewound, its distortion still recalling a family holiday. There are two films in here: one made from home videos, the other – its repository. In line with such proximity, Wells' fascination with how past and present coexist focuses on the points of eruption, the slow trickle, the stickiness of memory like ice cream on your fingers on a hot summer's day. **SAVINA PETKOVA**



Interview by **RAFA SALES ROSS** Illustration by **STÉPHANIE SERGEANT**

Charlotte Wells

The Scottish debut director taking the film world by storm with Aftersun *on the film's depiction of youth and memory.*

Cinema is rooted in the exploration – and manipulation – of memory. This notion feels true of Charlotte Wells' stunning directorial debut *Aftersun*, a quietly devastating portrayal of a summer holiday shared by a young girl and her father (played beautifully by newcomer Frankie Corio and rising star Paul Mescal). It is a striking work by a filmmaker whose name you are bound to hear again.

LWLies: Much of *Aftersun* is presented through the eyes of 11-year-old Sophie. How was it for you to get back to that mindset of a child? Wells: I spent a lot of time thinking about the right age for Sophie. I considered younger and I considered older. Ultimately, the most interesting thing about 11 is that it is the point where self-consciousness emerges – it's a step toward adolescence that you can't take back. It just seemed like the best of the best of both worlds in a certain way, being able to interact with the older kids while also still having that childlike innocence.

It was fun to look through photo albums and think back to memories of a really specific moment in my life. At age 11, I was moving schools, it was the late '90s, the height of the Spice Girls, and it's a period of time I have a lot of memories of. It's a point of childhood where you retain quite a lot, rather than earlier years, which are more like glimpses, the kind of memories you wonder if it's a photograph you've seen a hundred times rather than the memory itself.

The film is also about that pivotal point in your life when you start figuring out your parents are people of their own. I think this age is perfect to explore that idea. One hundred per cent. That was one of the things on the very top of my mind when I was writing. It's that age when you start to have an awareness of your parents as people. I think it takes until your teenage years for it to really set in, and maybe a version of Sophie who was 16 would've gone into the tension of that a lot more. I think 11-year-olds start to see it but don't really have the capacity to understand it, so it's just kind of specific observations that don't quite coalesce into a real perception yet. Adults are locked in the roles that they perform for kids.

It was always very important to me that Sophie be protected from what's going on with Calum, and that he succeeds, for the most part, in protecting her from his own struggles. So much of the film is Sophie looking back with more knowledge acquired about what her dad might have been going through, and trying to figure out if maybe there was something that she missed. But of course, she could have never seen it because she was a trusting kid for whom her father was just her father.

Certain songs are key to the emotional gut punches of the film, particularly Queen's 'Under Pressure'. How did it come to be a part of the film? There were many songs in the playlist I was working with, and 'Under Pressure' was not one of them. It was a late night discovery while cutting the rave scene, which I had been avoiding because it was really challenging footage to work with and because I knew it had to work and I was terrified to find that it did not. Music is the thing I tend to go to when I'm procrastinating or warming up or both, and this version of 'Under Pressure' is one I sometimes listen to.

It was just one of those accidental yet beautiful discoveries that was, as somebody put to me, a capital C choice. It takes a lot of confidence to wear your heart on your sleeve in the way the song does in the film and I am really happy with it. It's always the moment I'm most excited to hear – when Calum falls back, sees both Sophies, and the music just surges. That's always the moment I'm most excited to experience in the cinema.

At one point, Calum says, "There's this feeling once you leave where you're from, where you grew up, you don't totally belong there again, not really". Is this the same for you? Will you always be drawn to Scotland for your films? I wrote that dialogue and there are many aspects of Calum that are as much me as they are my dad, and that's definitely one that belongs to me – and may well have belonged to my dad. It's difficult when you leave where you're from, especially when you leave relatively young. Sometimes, when I'm expressing this, I feel like I am just quoting the film, so I feel like this is one of the ways in which the film stands for itself. In a way, Edinburgh will always be home

Three Minutes: A Lengthening

Directed by **BIANCA STIGTER**
Released **2 DECEMBER**

In 2009, writer Glenn Kurtz discovered a degraded 16mm film in the attic of his parents' home. It belonged to his grandfather, David Kurtz, an amateur filmmaker who was born in the small Polish town of Nasielsk before migrating to America. Equipped with a Kodak camera during a trip to Europe in 1938, he would shoot 14 minutes of black and white and Kodachrome film, three of which would become one of the only known fragments of history left of the predominantly Jewish population in Nasielsk, one year before the Nazi invasion of Poland.

Slowed down, freeze-framed and recontextualised, this fragment of found footage allows filmmaker Bianca Stigter to attempt the titular "lengthening" through fleshing out and delving deep into the vibrant world within the images. The result of exclusively repurposing this single film strip is often hypnotic in its immersion in colour, magnified textures and dissections of details embedded in clothing and shop fronts. Of the 100-plus locals that populate Kurtz's frames, only 11 survivors have been identified, while the identities of the indistinguishable shadows captured by the camera remain resistant even to André Bazin's analogy of cinematic mummification. *Three Minutes* culminates in a contemplation of its central paradox: "The absence in the presence". It provides a vital memorial to the people whose lives have been lost to time, revealing the significance of preserving film as much as preserving history. **MARINA ASHIOTI**

ANTICIPATION
An ambitious undertaking. **3**

ENJOYMENT
Incredible attention to detail, but Helena Bonham Carter's narration wears thin. **3**

IN RETROSPECT
Thoroughly compelling and haunting. **4**

Call Jane

Directed by **PHYLLIS NAGY**
Starring **ELIZABETH BANKS, SIGOURNEY WEAVER, CHRIS MESSINA**
Released **4 NOVEMBER**

It's hard to predict the climate into which a long-gestated story will be birthed. So, this, the year that saw Roe v Wade overruled by the American Supreme Court has dramatically altered the lens through the film *Call Jane* will be viewed.

It's about the Jane Collective who, during the late '60s and early '70s helped women in need of safe abortions. It's directed by Phyllis Nagy, best known for writing 2015's lesbian Christmas movie *Carol*, the film tells of the collective's heroism through the fictional character glamorous suburban housewife Joy (Elizabeth Banks) who discovers that her second pregnancy will likely kill her. Unfortunately for Joy, the medical and legal establishment deems that her life is a sacrifice they are willing to make in the name of ideology.

She seeks help from, and then joins the group, headed up by tough cookie Virginia (Sigourney Weaver) and a motley crew of second wave feminists. The dialogue has polish and nuance, but there is a strange levity of tone that prevents it from feeling substantial enough for the subject matter. Zippy duologues, expertly teased beehives and stunning period costumes may make this pro-choice message more palatable to the masses, but ultimately the film pulls its punches, never lingering long enough on a single scene or tragedy to let the impact of these women's work consume the audience. **LEILA LATIF**

ANTICIPATION
In a post Roe v Wade world, what is a Sundance dramedy going to contribute? **3**

ENJOYMENT
Sigourney Weaver sure does know her way around a withering put-down. **3**

IN RETROSPECT
A whisper to arms when a call was needed. **3**

Clara Sola

Directed by **NATHALIE ÁLVAREZ MESÉN**
Starring **WENDY CHINCHILLA ARAYA, ANA JULIA PORRAS ESPINOZA**
Released **18 NOVEMBER**

In a green, rural backwater of Costa Rica, middle-aged Clara (Wendy Chinchilla Araya) is in arrested development. She lives in a secluded forest with her hyper-religious family, yet her burgeoning sexuality is stimulated by everything from soap operas to soil. And all this is underscored by a hodgepodge of references to the Virgin Mary. It's a film apt for current socio-political climes, as the verdant beauty of nature is framed as a cure-all for woes, and it's where Clara finds solace. Nathalie Álvarez Mesén's film remains slightly distanced throughout, raking back the sand of her imagery but never really digging deep. The film treats its subjects as Clara's family do her – at arm's length.

And yet, the feverish and feral performanced by Araya drags the film back from operating as a wispy metaphor. For Clara, every noise or voice offers an eerie reminder of her real life, and pulls her back from this waking dream. Clara is always on the precipice of eruption; her simmering exasperation is just waiting to transform into bubbling hellfire. This works as a metaphor for the film as a whole, which is always reaching towards its ideas and themes but never truly grasping them. Ironically, for a story about a woman who struggles to express herself, the film tangles itself in knots with its ill-defined ideas. **FINLAY SPENCER**

ANTICIPATION
An intriguing Costa Rican character study which explores the human bounds of spiritual belief. **3**

ENJOYMENT
An amazing central performance, but too insistent in the way it delivers its themes. **3**

IN RETROSPECT
In the end, the metaphor gets in the way of the emotion. **2**

Cette Maison

Directed by **MIRYAM CHARLES**
Starring **EVE DURANCEAU, NADINE JEAN, SCHELBY JEAN-BAPTISTE**
Released **4 NOVEMBER**

Shot in sumptuous and hazy 16mm film, Haitian-Canadian filmmaker Miryam Charles' debut feature attempts a fluid journey in time and space – across Haiti, Connecticut and Quebec – that coalesces in an elusive reimagining of Black girlhood. *Cette Maison* takes the death of the filmmaker's 14-year-old cousin and imaginatively reconstructs her memory through personal, generational and geographic remenisces.

The storytelling leans into magical realism and evokes the qualities of what cultural historian Saidiya Hartman calls "critical fabulation" — a blend of fact and fiction through the use of imagination and empathy, where past, present and future are spatiotemporally intertwined with fantasy. Charles confidently constructs a counternarrative that elaborates on the gaps and conflicting details within police and autopsy reports, savouring unknowability by way of interrogating, recovering and restoring lost potentialities within a story that is "impossible to tell". A Brechtian dedication to artifice is immensely difficult to pull off on screen, but Charles' visual style is remarkably reflexive, as imagined encounters are translated into bold and evocative visual assemblages. The result is luminescent. Personal trauma, violence, grief and loss are not merely confronted. They become paving stones to forging a path that allows the film to travel through the complexities of its resonant emotional core and blossom into a spectral, genre-defying enigma. **MARINA ASHIOTI**

ANTICIPATION
An imagined biography promises to cultivate a surreal account of life and death. **3**

ENJOYMENT
Sharp, intimate and tactful. **5**

IN RETROSPECT
An accomplished debut signalling Miryam Charles as a filmmaker to look out for. **5**

She Said

Directed by	**MARIA SCHRADER**
Starring	**ZOE KAZAN, CAREY MULLIGAN, SAMANTHA MORTON**
Released	**25 NOVEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
Hollywood's take on #MeToo has been patchy – let's hope this isn't another Bombshell. **3**

ENJOYMENT.
Pedestrian in style but compelling and deeply moving at times. **4**

IN RETROSPECT.
May not stand the test of time but engaging and never sensational. **3**

She Said opens with a pale young woman with cropped hair walking along the Irish coast. To her astonishment an 18th century galleon is suddenly revealed, bustling with navy officers in tricorn hats. She's stumbled onto a film set. Her awe is violently interrupted with a hard cut to her running full pelt down a city street stricken with terror. Nothing in *She Said* ever quite equals the sheer emotional power of this prologue, but it builds towards a moving conclusion without ever feeling manipulative.

Starring Carey Mulligan and Zoe Kazan as real *New York Times* investigative reporters Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor, this is a classic journalism movie but one that turns its gaze to Hollywood itself. The film is a dramatisation of Twohey and Kantor's book of the same name, published in 2019 and which details how they first broke the story of Harvey Weinstein's decades of sexual abuse and the payouts that silenced his survivors. With compassion and determination, the pair pursue a whisper network of actresses and former staff who are either bound by non-disclosure agreements or simply too traumatised to speak publicly. The film is largely comprised of conversations between these women, with Samantha Morton as the grimly matter-of-fact former Miramax employee Zelda Perkins and a wonderful Jennifer Ehle as Laura Madden, an older incarnation of the young woman in the prologue.

Kitty Green's wonderful *The Assistant* from 2019 named no names but was clearly about a young woman working for Weinstein, but director Maria Schrader and screenwriter Rebecca Lenkiewicz are concerned with being explicit with the real details of the investigation. Real audio recordings of Weinstein are played, and even key figures such as Ashley Judd play themselves. This gambit is sometimes effective but can be distracting – Schrader asks her audience to forget that Mulligan and Kazan are stars themselves while including these elements of realism, highlighting the artifice more than anything else. There's plenty of the nitty-gritty detail of what it takes to publish such a momentous story, and it's also intriguing just to see the cavernous interior of the *New York Times* office – a feature film has never been shot there before. But what makes *She Said* different to other journalism films is simple but significant: Twohey and Kantor are working mothers who can't drop everything to chase a lead, and real life is happening alongside their work.

Dozens of films have been described as "#MeToo movies" but only a handful have directly engaged with those events. As much as there is a Hollywood sheen to *She Said* in its victory-against-all-odds narrative and in the shallow decision to age-down the characters to fit Mulligan and Kazan, it's a solid recounting of the investigation that would irrevocably shake the film industry. The conclusion is perhaps guilty of implying that bringing down Weinstein meant bringing down misogyny itself, but it's hard not to be moved when Kantor collapses into Twohey's arms, overwhelmed by the knowledge that the survivors they met will finally have their voices heard. **LAURA VENNING**

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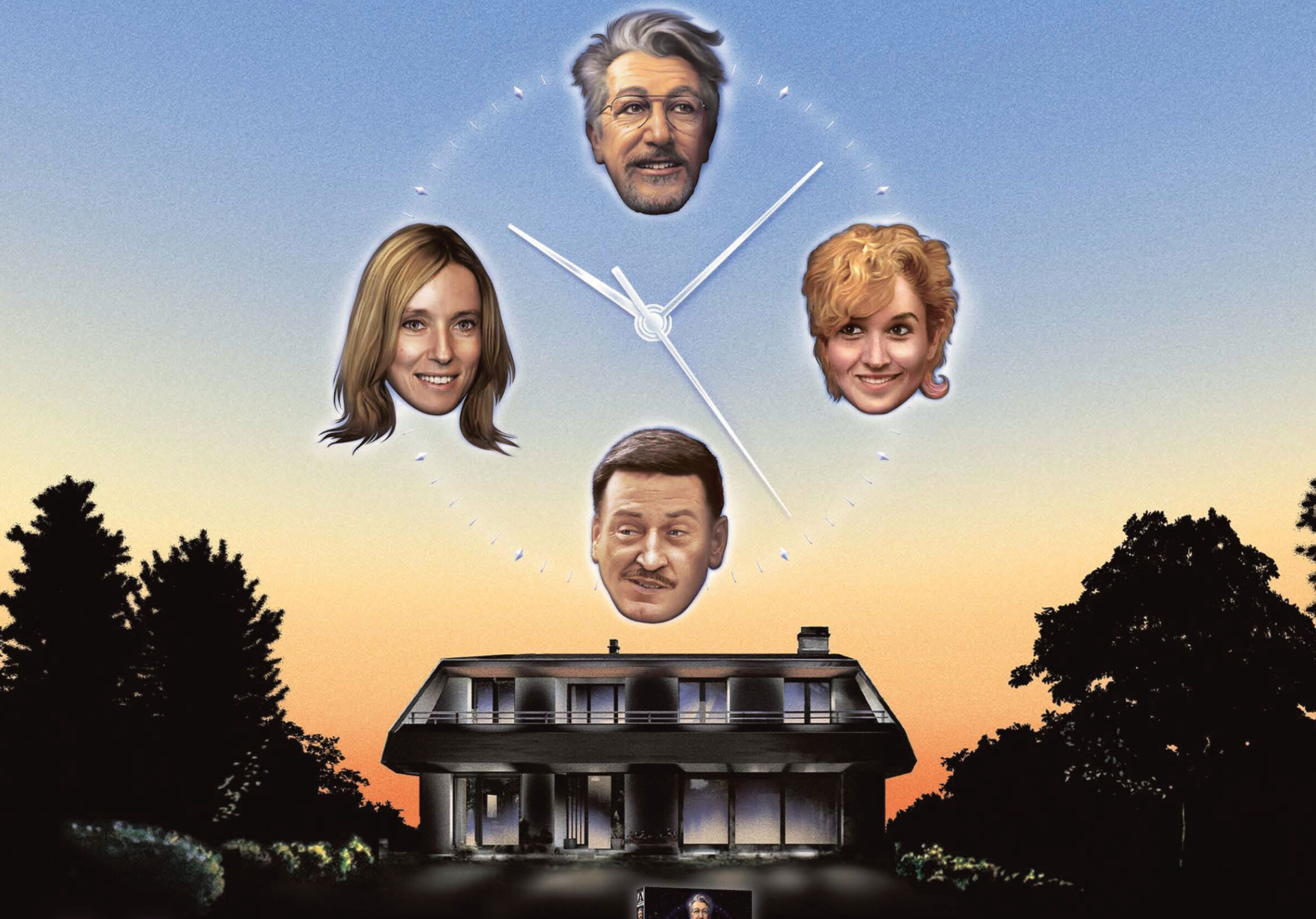

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PETER BRADSHAW, **THE GUARDIAN**

Lynch/Oz

Directed by **ALEXANDRE O PHILIPPE**
Released **2 DECEMBER**

The spectre of Victor Fleming's 1939 *The Wizard of Oz*, in all its Technicolor glory, ceaselessly haunts the collective American psyche. Distilled into a pair of sequined red pumps, this staggeringly permanent cultural touchstone has become "public real estate", and like a recurring hallucination, has left an indelible mark on David Lynch's filmmaking, warping the porous veil between reality and imagination.

Alexandre O. Philippe's *Lynch/Oz* sees a cohort of six distinct and illuminating essays (each written and voiced by film critic Amy Nicholson, camp auteur John Waters, director duo Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead, and filmmakers Karyn Kusama, Rodney Ascher and David Lowery) guiding us through the yellow brick road as they examine the how *Oz*'s influence and cultural vernacular is thoroughly embedded into the very core of Lynch's cinematic oeuvre. The video essay format reigns supreme as the most popular form of online film criticism, largely due to the insight that can be gleaned from a thesis-driven approach that's supplemented by moving image and enhanced with sound. As well as being a wholly accessible, democratic and DIY pursuit, this relatively young form of analysis has carved a new and exciting space between criticism and digital media-making, and has become an increasingly valuable part of our digital ecosystem.

By transposing the video essay format to a feature-length affair, Philippe attempts a union of theory (criticism) and practice (documentary filmmaking), and so the very ontology of *Lynch/Oz* becomes a subject of fascination in its own right. The question that hangs over the film, however, is: does this episodic endeavour benefit from a feature-length approach?

Using ominous gusts of wind, dissociative fugues and a woman named Judy as entry points, each perspective adds a different dimension to the work of a filmmaker whose aversion to attach meaning to his work is famously unwavering. Such prolonged encounters with Lynch's filmography seen through the lens of his biggest influence – treatises that go beyond the magical realism of *Wild at Heart*, which is so explicitly filtered through *Oz* iconography – bring about an extended and affectively charged engagement with the stylistic and cultural complexities of both Lynch's oeuvre, as well as the magic of *Oz*.

Karyn Kusama's section perfectly straddles the line between personable and insightful. She recalls attending a NYFF screening of *Mulholland Dr*. As he is wont to do, Lynch spoke about the film quite elliptically, and was then asked by an audience member to talk about his relationship to *The Wizard of Oz*. His response: "There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about *The Wizard of Oz*". **MARINA ASHIOTI**

ANTICIPATION. 3
Down the proverbial rabbit hole we go...

ENJOYMENT. 4
Varied, compelling and evocative explorations of Lynch's craft and though processes.

IN RETROSPECT. 3
Ultimately less than the sum of its parts.

Bones and All

Directed by **LUCA GUADAGNINO**
Starring **TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET, TAYLOR HOLLAND, MARK RYLANCE**
Released **25 NOVEMBER**

At the end of Maurice Sendak's 1963 children's book, 'Where the Wild Things Are', when Max must return home, the wild things cry out, "Please don't go – we'll eat you up – we love you so!" It's an ominous threat, but what could be more romantic than someone – quite literally – becoming a part of you? This line of prose comes to mind after watching Luca Guadagnino's *Bones and All*, in which a pair of teenage cannibals find love in a hopeless place (rural Indiana) and set off on a road trip across the United States in search of belonging.

Adapted by Guadagnino's regular collaborator David Kajganich from Camille DeAngelis' 2015 novel of the same name, it's a love story with teeth that sees sheltered Maren (Taylor Russell) forced to strike out on her own after her father (Andre Holland) abandons her, sickened by his daughter's peculiar appetites. After a disturbing encounter with fellow 'Eater' Sully (a suitably creepy Mark Rylance) Maren crosses paths with Lee (Timothée Chalamet), a wiry punk with little interest in making friends. Despite his initial aloofness, Maren gets under his skin, and a bond between them forms as they set off to Minnesota in search of the mother she has never met.

Guadagnino sticks to small towns and backroads, and cinematographer Arseni Khachaturan's shots of breathtaking open country and eerie liminal spaces are reminiscent of Terrence Malick's *Badlands* – another film about young outcasts on the lam. The affliction Maren and Lee share has manifested differently in each of them: she is bookish and gentle; he is all sinewy muscle and sharp edges.

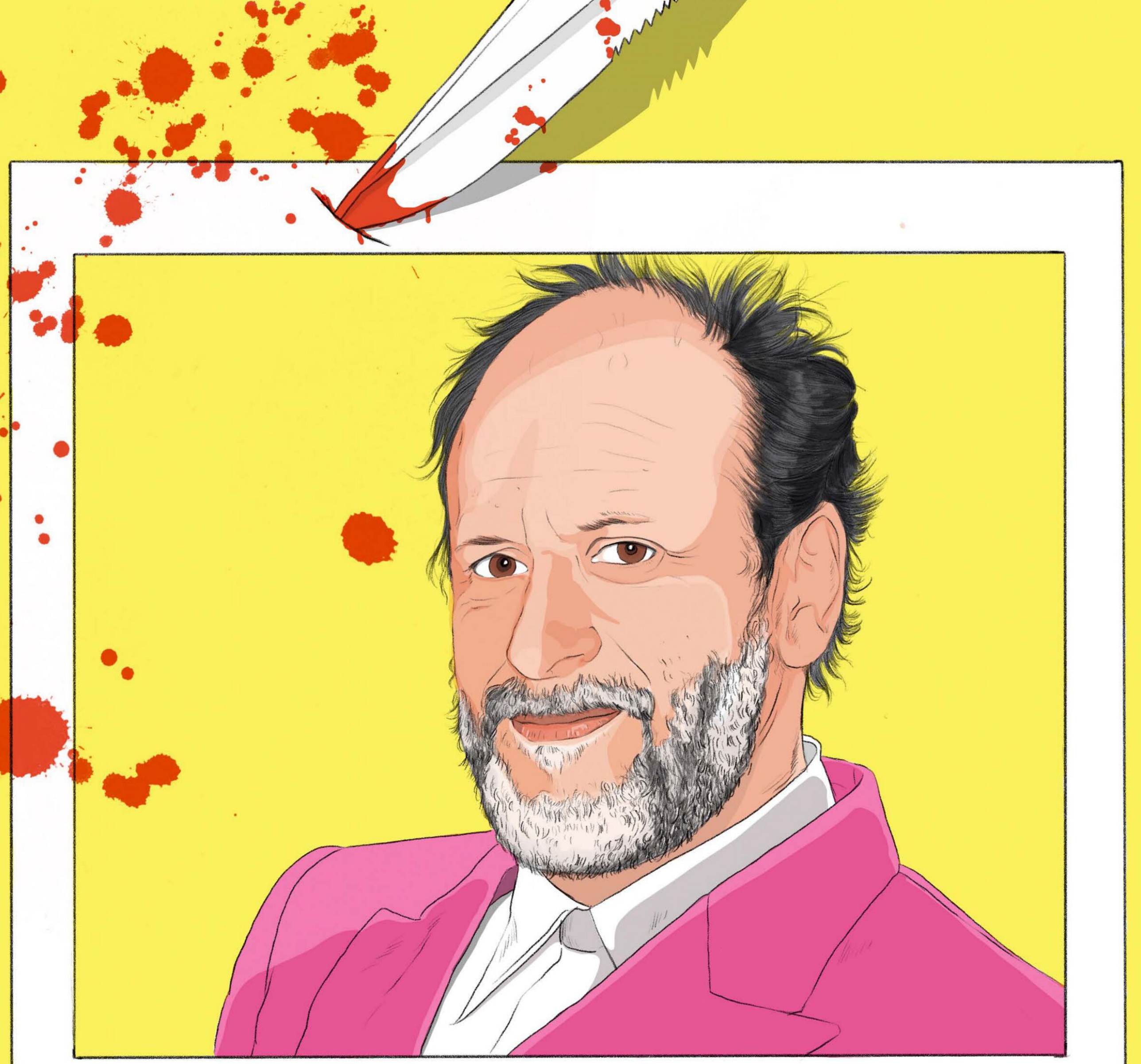
It's a familiar dynamic, but Russell and Chalamet are charming enough to breathe new life into it. He melts around her, learning to open up about past traumas, and in turn teaches Maren how to survive in a cruel world – one in which they seem to be both predator and prey. It's a shame that some of the most interesting scenes from DeAngelis' novel end up on the cutting room floor, and the setting of Reagan's America is established but not interrogated. Instead, this is a film about light among the darkness, and for every tendon ripped out with teeth there's a gentle caress, a shy smile. Chalamet is particularly charming when it comes to carefully unravelling Lee's past transgressions.

After the silliness of his *Suspiria* remake, it's good to see Guadagnino focussing on one of his greatest strengths: showing how we lust after and love one another. *Bones and All* gets at the fragility and futility of human existence. It's an imperfect but enervating film, one that feels lived-in (shout out to the eclectic soundtrack and Giulia Piersanti's' expressive costume design) and speaks to the human desire to love and be loved, in spite of our flaws. **HANNAH STRONG**

ANTICIPATION. 4
Always keen to catch up with Luca Guadagnino.

ENJOYMENT. 4
A sweet and sticky summer romance.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
A sumptuous horror of a film.



Interview by **HANNAH STRONG** Illustration by **STÉPHANIE SERGEANT**

Luca Guadagnino

The mercurial Italian director on being coaxed into making Bones and All *and tag-teaming with his old friend Timothée Chalamet.*

Italian chronicler of desire Luca Guadagnino takes a road trip across Ronald Reagan's America in *Bones and All*, adapted from a young adult novel about a pair of cannibals who fall in love while trying to find themselves. Combining the horror of *Suspiria* with the delicate romance of *Call Me by Your Name*, his latest film is a tender, tragic, timeless love story that sees him reunite with Timothée Chalamet. After a rapturous premiere at the Venice Film Festival, audiences are set to fall in love with Taylor Russell, who plays recently abandoned teenager Maren, as she sets out to find the mother she's never met. We caught up with one of the busiest men in Hollywood as he works on the final cut of his next film, tennis drama *Challengers*.

LWLies: We understand you were initially a little hesitant to take on the script for *Bones and All*, even though you've worked with David Kajganich a few times now. Why did you change your mind? Guadagnino: I was hesitant because I was busy and I had so many things on my plate, as they say. I felt that in reading the script and giving a false promise to David about being interested, I could make him lose time, and I didn't want that at all. Because I love him. He insisted, and my school of thought is when someone asks you more than once to do something, then you have to surrender and say yes. So I said, 'Okay, I'll read it,' but with a caveat that I was reading it because I want to read something written by him, not because I was going to consider it. Of course, once I started reading it, I felt so powerfully pulled into this world of drifters, of the disenfranchised, in this fable of America, which reminded me of the Brothers Grimm stories about Europe. The characters were so beautifully fleshed out, so precise, the vernacular was so inspiring... and the opportunity that the script gave me to think of Timothée as my partner for this. All of these elements made me completely surrender and say yes.

How did you approach Timothée about the opportunity – did you have to sell it to him, or did he jump at the chance to reunite? I don't have to sell anything to him. I just called my friend Brian Swardstrom, his agent, because my rule is even if you are friends with actors you cannot approach them directly with the proposal. But I have also the privilege of being friends with him. So I said 'Brian what do you think about this?' 'Oh, I love it'. 'Should I give it to Timothée?' 'Sure'. So we gave it to him. He was in Rome, I was in Milan, so I went to Rome. We had a beautiful conversation that led to another conversation a few days afterwards, that led to another conversation and gave me, David and Timothée the beautiful chance to spend time together, elaborating on these ideas, and turning David's script into the script we eventually shot.

What did Timothée contribute to Lee's character? I can give you an example – he didn't think that Lee had to feel protective in the life of Maren, the way it was coming across in the first draft. He thought that Maren and Lee, both of them had to feel lost and fragile. A beautiful idea. That's a real Chalamet touch.

Were there any films or cultural reference points you gave to Timothée and Taylor? I gave them *Sans Toit Ni Loi*, by Agnès Varda, which is *Vagabond* in English, *Germany Year Zero*, by Roberto Rossellini. Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman*, Bresson's *A Man Escaped*. I like the Akerman because this character she doesn't do anything. Akerman is almost clinical in following this woman's routines. I think that is an amazing performance, both in terms of how the director understands the performance and the character, and the actress understands the character and performance. It was important to me that Taylor knew I wasn't looking for the drama. I hate drama.

Really? I hate when you see actors acting. I don't believe in acting, as much as I believe in performance.

What would you say the difference is between the two? Performance is in everything and becoming and behaviour – acting is resorting to the toolbox that you might have learnt in some theatrical acting school or what you think is the way you think an actor should act

The Silent Twins

Directed by **AGNIESZKA SMOCZYŃSKA**
Starring **LETITIA WRIGHT, JODHI MAY, MICHAEL SMILEY**
Released **9 DECEMBER**

Jennifer and June Gibbons were identical twins who loved writing, art and had vivid imaginations which enabled them to create fantastical stories. They also refused to speak to anyone except each other, which earned them the moniker 'The Silent Twins' and resulted in ostracisation and bullying. After attempts to separate the girls resulted in them becoming catatonic, they were allowed to remain together, but later bouts of drug use and petty crime resulted in them being detained in Broadmoor Psychiatric Hospital, where they remained for 11 years. In 1993, when they were moved to a less restrictive clinic in Wales, Jennifer died during transit. The cause of her death has never been fully determined.

This context is important for understanding Agnieszka Smoczyńska's adaptation of Marjorie Wallace's book about the twins, which boasts a fierce imagination and utilises various creative techniques in an attempt to celebrate the life of two women who were repeatedly failed by society. Despite its noble intentions, *The Silent Twins* is a broad-brush depiction of the Gibbons sisters' lives, one that fails to represent the institutional racism and discrimination which had a profoundly damaging effect on them and quite possibly led to Jennifer's death.

The film opens with an animated fourth wall breaking credit sequence as Eva-Ariana Baxter and Leah Mondesir Simmons (who play the Gibbons twins as children) introduce the cast. It's a charming scene that suggests a levity the film is keen to thread through the story, as Jennifer and June's shared language and imagination provide an escape from a world that continually refuses to understand them. This is contrasted against a stark reality full of sour-faced bureaucrats and kindly but concerned onlookers who consistently reinforce the idea that the twins' strong bond is detrimental to their health.

This is where the film falters. Growing up in the 1980s, especially as a Black child with a perceived mental illness, would likely have come with a great deal more stigma, racism and hardship than Smoczyńska and Siegel depict. It also fails to convey that Broadmoor was one of the most notorious psychiatric facilities in the country – a place where 'patients' included Peter Sutcliffe and Ronnie Kray – and abuse was rampant.

The Gibbons family has spoken about how the twins' health declined as a result of being held against their will for 11 years, but this film does not do a great deal to condemn the draconian structures that purported to protect the twins but, in reality, only served to harm them. Despite a strong ensemble, the story stops short of condemning the cruelty of the system, which feels crucial to why they might have retreated so much into themselves and the imaginary worlds they created together. **HANNAH STRONG**

ANTICIPATION. *A fascinating, tragic subject for a film.* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *Expressive but underwritten.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT. *Only scratches the surface of a grave injustice.* **2**

Bardo, False Chronicle of a Handful of Truths

Directed by	**ALEJANDRO G. IÑÁRRITU**
Starring	**DANIEL GIMÉNEZ CACHO, GRISELDA SICILIANI, XIMENA LAMADRID**
Released	**18 NOVEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
A new film by Iñárritu always warrants attention.
4

ENJOYMENT.
The balanced mesh of melancholia goes on a little too long, but merits the indulgent runtime.
3

IN RETROSPECT.
A confidently realised examination of cultural displacement.
4

"My homeland has many palm trees and the thrush-song fills its air; no bird here can sing as well as the birds sing over there" Brazilian poet Antônio Gonçalves Dias famously uttered in 'Exile Song', a poem written in 1983 during his time as a student in Portugal. The words are simple yet fitly communicate the burning ache that is homesickness – the romantic conviction that no feeling can ever be felt as deeply as when at home, no food can ever taste as good, and no music can ever be played as beautifully.

Dias' approach to displacement echoes heavily throughout Alejandro G Iñárritu's *Bardo, False Chronicle of a Handful of Truths*, which follows Mexican journalist and documentary filmmaker Silverio Gama (Daniel Giménez Cacho) in the lead-up to the ceremony that will see him take home the fictitious Alethea Award for Journalism Ethics, an honour given by the American Journalism Society. Being the first Mexican – and Latin American – journalist awarded the prestigious laurel bears a heavy weight on Gama's shoulder and attenuates a cultural and geographic disconnect that has plagued the man since he made the decision to move his family from his home country to the shiny hills of Los Angeles.

Yes, the blatantly autobiographical Bardo is acrimoniously self-indulgent. But it needs to be. The pained ache of diaspora can only be soothed by unbeatable arrogance, boastfulness a way of thinking of oneself as above origins, to become an island when the craving for the closeness of Pangea is all-consuming. To settle the wistful longing for one's country, one needs to become their own, entirely detached from all sense of belonging – bigger and bigger until all that doesn't pertain to the self feels futile. Otherwise, the what-could-have-beens become unbearable.

Vital to Iñárritu's musing on diaspora is the overbearing guilt experienced by the colonised when assimilating the cultural and social traits of the coloniser. Felt as if an act of treason, assimilation has intergenerational ripples, accentuated by the trauma carried for decades on end through the potency of bloodlines. Here, guilt is turned into a spectacle, as flamboyantly and self-importantly depicted as all else, Silverio at once Judas and Jesus, traitor and saviour. Bodies line up the cobbled streets of Mexico City, conquerors hovering over public plazas, the rooted sorrow of lands usurped through bloodbaths given lavish tangibility through the eyes of cinematographer Darius Khondji.

Bardo deviates from your run-of-the-mill ode to home in the sense that it is not as much an ode as it is an elegy – a work that carries a doleful sense of finality. Iñárritu places himself at the shore, watching as the last boat leaves the dock, forever stranded. It is an exercise in self-punishment disguised as self-aggrandisement, by a director powered by confident resignation and – for those unlucky enough to have experienced the gaping hole of yearning for home – it is entirely worth the self-indulgence. **RAFA SALES ROSS**

Tori and Lokita

Directed by	**JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE**
Starring	**PABLO SCHILS, MBUNDU JOELY, MARC ZINGA**
Released	**2 DECEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
The Dardennes are among the most reliable filmmakers around. **4**

ENJOYMENT.
Another beautifully observed drama that occasionally grips like a vice. **4**

IN RETROSPECT.
Humane and heart-breaking. **4**

LITTLE WHITE LIES. RECOMMENDS

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne have spent their career telling stories about characters living on the margins of Belgian society, and their 10th feature *Tori and Lokita* takes us back to the territory of their debut *La Promesse*, as it explores the exploitation of undocumented African immigrants. That 1996 film was told through a white Belgian protagonist – with Jérémie Renier's Igor being the first Dardennes lead to find himself at a moral crossroads – but the brothers have shifted their perspective here to follow two children from Cameroon and Benin. They may be the most vulnerable characters these filmmakers have yet given us.

Tori (Pablo Schils) and Lokita (Mbundu Joely) met on the boat when they were smuggled into Europe, but Lokita poses as Tori's older sister to aid her application for a work permit, and to ensure the pair can stay together. She is forced to substantiate that fiction in a series of harsh interrogations by the authorities that often leave her panic-stricken and in tears, but while the familial bond may be false, these marvellous young actors make us fully believe in it. Lokita is another quietly resolute Dardennes heroine in the tradition of *Rosetta* or *The Silence of Lorna*, while the more tenacious Tori reminds us of *The Kid with a Bike* as he runs and cycles determinedly across town. At one point, his impulsive decision to race across the road unwisely draws the attention of the police, an unnerving reminder of how precarious their legal status is.

Things get even more dangerous for Tori and Lokita when they spend their Friday nights selling drugs for a dealer who operates out of the kitchen in an Italian restaurant. This is their only means of making money to send to Lokita's family, but in doing so she is subjected to the dealer's sexual impositions, and the pair must avoid the smuggler (a briefly chilling Marc Zinga) who demands whatever cash they are carrying to repay their debt. In this film there are vultures everywhere and all these kids have in the world is each other, so when they are separated the tension instantly ramps up. Nobody does tension quite like the Dardenne brothers. As in so many of their films, there's a moment in *Tori and Lokita* when a character makes a fateful decision and the narrative suddenly snaps into focus, creating stretches of the drama when you're holding your breath and feeling a roiling sense of anxiety in the pit of your stomach.

It's only at this point that you realise how deeply invested you have become in the fate of these children, and how powerfully the Dardennes generate empathy by creating authentic characters with simple desires and inviting us to live in their world for a brief time. The Dardennes' style has barely evolved since their debut feature, but it's so potent it doesn't need to. What does need to evolve is the way we treat the kind of people they make films about. More than 25 years after *La Promesse*, the Dardennes have had to make another film about the way immigrants in Europe are abandoned by the state to be exploited, abused and dehumanised. *Plus ça change.*

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LITTLE WHITE LIES. RECOMMENDS.

No Bears

Directed by **JAFAR PANAHI**
Starring **JAFAR PANAHI, REZA HEYDARI, MINA KAVANI**
Released **11 NOVEMBER**

Mere weeks separated the world premiere of Jafar Panahi's latest film *No Bears* from his latest arrest over accusations of propaganda against the Iranian state. The filmmaker – first imprisoned in 2010 on the same charges – has been banned from making movies, writing screenplays and speaking with any Iranian or foreign media for the last 10 years, with another 10 outstanding on his sentence. This has not stopped him in that time for he has produced a whopping five features, including 2011's seminal *This Is Not a Film* and the 2015 Golden Bear-winner *Taxi Tehran*.

Panahi's literal and metaphorical entrapment feeds into the metatextuality of *No Bears*. Here, the filmmaker plays himself, but all else around him is a mixture of fact and fiction, with two sets of lovers placed against the political structures that have forced the Iranian master into a stateless exile. The first pair comprises a contemporary Romeo and Juliet kept apart by the outdated rituals of the small community that acts as the director's refuge; the second is a pair of long-term partners whose relationship runs parallel to their fight against Iran's authoritarian regime.

Diaspora is defined by Panahi by this very sense of statelessness: "He feels trapped, with no future, no freedom and no job," the director tells his fictional assistant (played by his real-life sound designer Reza Heydari), a simply put yet beautifully layered encapsulation of this particular kind of claustrophobic despair.

No Bears often echoes Abbas Kiarostami's forlorn 1997 film *Taste of Cherry*, with a car recklessly driving through the arid lands of the Iranian desert to carry out a nihilistic desire to flirt with self-destruction. Yet, Panahi – who started his career under Kiarostami's wing – bypasses the melancholia often employed by his mentor in favour of tapping into a seam of humour that permeates most of his films. Life, as they say, goes on, and *No Bears* observes people toiling away at existing while Panahi wrestles with matters existential.

There are no bears in *No Bears*. The animal stands in for the way in which control is often established in society through the perpetuation of Machiavellian myths. "Stories are made up to scare us. Our fear empowers others," a man tensely whispers to Panahi as they near the heavily-policed Iranian borders. The same ground that once bore the sturdy foundation of a loving home now stands eternally scarred by the searing cuts of imaginary lines, an irreparable fissure that – in Panahi's heartfelt visual diary – cruelly severs the frail umbilical cord to the motherland.

RAFA SALES ROSS

ANTICIPATION. 4
A new one from the incarcerated Iranian director Jafar Panahi. Need we say more?

ENJOYMENT. 4
An inspired exercise in autofiction that is as illuminating as it is witty

IN RETROSPECT. 4
This is Panahian social commentary at its finest.

The Menu

Directed by **MARK MYLOD**
Starring **RALPH FIENNES, ANYA TAYLOR-JOY, NICOLAS HOULT**
Released **18 NOVEMBER**

For Ralph Fiennes' character chef Slowik in Mark Mylod's *The Menu*, revenge is a dish best served on a crescent of edible puce foam and with an air-fried chicory wafer balancing on top. We are bussed directly into a minimalist lifestyle world of elite fine dining where a gesticulating gaggle of one-dimensional nasties have managed to secure a table at the world-famous seat of experimental gastronomy – Hawthorne. Slowik acts as master of ceremonies for a sense-challenging, multi-course cavalcade of disruption and discord, as his fiendish concoctions come with built-in moral lessons and are intended to challenge any and all preconceptions we have about food.

Unlike Slowik, whose murderous fixation with subtle flavour combinations has driven him to creative frenzy, Mylod, along with screenwriters Seth Reiss and Will Tracy, are very keen to show the dull simplicity of their working early on. It's clear from the opening preamble that some twisted shit is about to go down, as Hong Chau's maître is openly aggressive and patronising towards the guests before they've even had a chance to take a seat. In the aggressively polite world of dining – fine or otherwise – this rings a very false note, and it's one that is repeated throughout a film in which the makers don't really have any answer for why the diners remain in place to be abused.

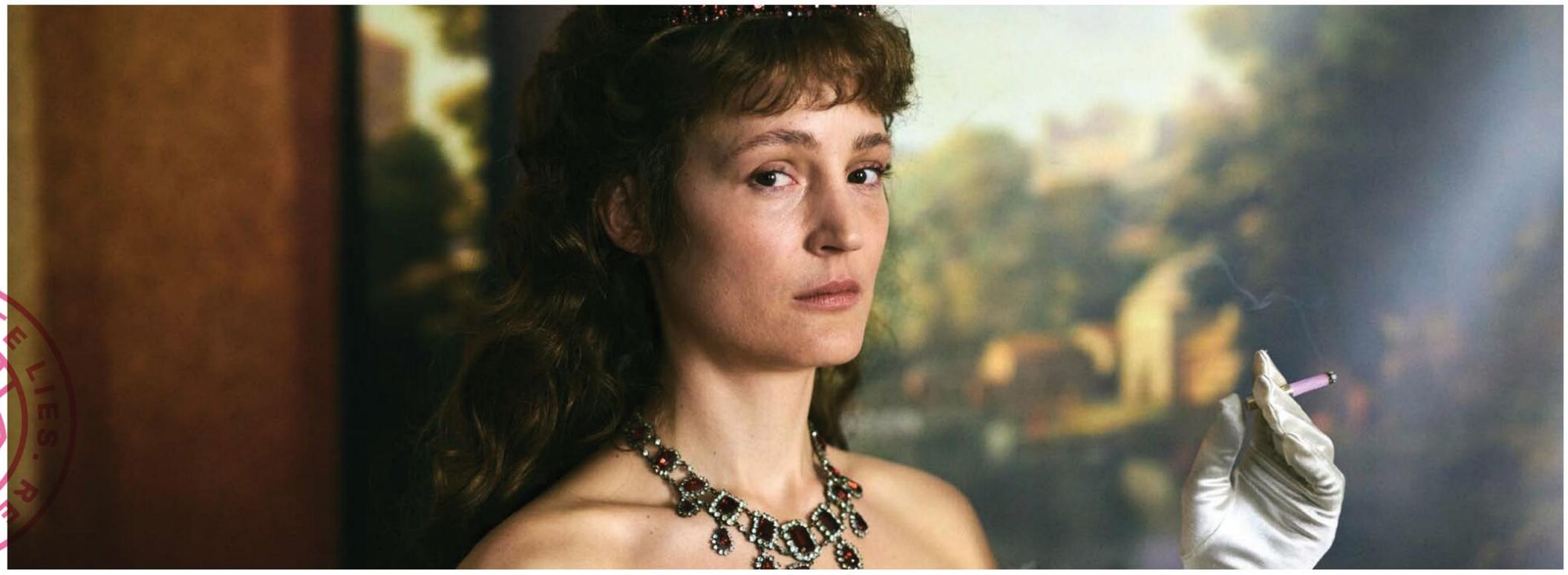
The film can be summed up as, what if one of the bad *Saw* sequels took place in a restaurant not dissimilar to Copenhagen's conceptually-enlightened Noma? Slowik, for reasons that are never made clear, rolls out a tasting menu he considers to be his *pièce de résistance*, and rather than provide his punters with the simple enjoyment that comes from sustenance, he is more interested in prodding the metaphorical sores of their private backgrounds and humiliating them for petty moral infractions where the punishment far outweighs the crime. Perhaps unintentionally, *The Menu* is a film that assumes a conservative political stance in asking us to cheer on the ritual torture of sundry tech bros, food critics, a man who has committed infidelity, an over-the-hill film actor, and an extreme foodie played by Nicolas Hoult who just doesn't seem to be of this planet.

Our one locus of respite within this gang of deplorables is Anya Taylor-Joy's Margot, who was invited by Hoult's character on a whim and is not part of chef Slowik's grand scheme. The pungent whiff of designer cynicism pervades every scene, so not only is it difficult to understand why these diners aren't taking their business elsewhere (which they absolutely would do if they're the capitalist scum we're told they are), but it's difficult to give two hoots as to whether they stay or go. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. 4
Fiennes, food and fiendishness... what could possibly go wrong?

ENJOYMENT. 1
Oof. Undercooked, rotten ingredients, and just never looks particularly appetising.

IN RETROSPECT. 1
Horribly cynical, conceptually overwrought, leaves a very bad taste. Shall not be returning.



Corsage

Directed by **MARIE KREUTZER**
Starring **VICKY KRIEPS, COLIN MORGAN, FINNEGAN OLDFIELD**
Released **30 DECEMBER**

What starts with a bathtub ends with the sea in *Corsage*, the latest from Austrian filmmaker Marie Kreutzer. Is it breathing techniques Empress Elisabeth of Austria is practising in the film's opening scene, making her maids count how long she can spend under her bath water, or a dalliance with death? Is she looking for a way to end her life, or to save it?

Kreutzer's costume-drama is an invigorating take on the period piece, a vibrant film that rejects the staid conformity of the genre and finds its intimate angles. Ostensibly a film about a royal woman in crisis, not dissimilar to Pablo Larraín's *Spencer* or Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, *Corsage* revels in the personality and conviction of Empress Elisabeth – played with wit and verve by the brilliant Vicky Krieps. Nearing her 40th birthday, the monarch is well aware of how the public will look upon her as an older woman. She must both entertain and dismiss this – when she faints at a royal engagement there is an assumption that her expertly tightened corset (demanded by herself) must have cut off her oxygen supply, but a subsequent scene reveals her teaching a cousin how she faked the collapse.

Elisabeth toys with avoidance tactics and schemes to get herself out of the daily royal performance. On a quest for personal freedom, she travels to England and Bavaria where former lovers once taught her to ride horses and embrace her liberty. She poses for portraits dressed in ball gowns with white fur trim and red jewels, smoking lilac Sobranies – a vision in kitsch. Cinematographer Judith Kaufmann's camera is rarely static, speaking to Elisabeth's desire to roam, while the rich grain of 35mm adds a satisfying and beautiful texture to the film.

There is an intriguing sense of interior geography inside the palace that represents Elisabeth's home and prison. In between the lavishly decorated bedrooms and dining halls are blank and bare hallways that look as though they are made from concrete. Servants linger, waiting for commands, but the director's choice to return to these spaces gives them as much value as anywhere else. They become a sort of backstage area, the link between the theatres of Elisabeth's life.

While markedly different from Kreutzer's previous film, the excellent subdued psychological thriller *The Ground Beneath My Feet*, *Corsage* is another example of the director's knack for astute depictions of women unravelling, searching for a sense of self. With her troupe of ladies-in-waiting by her side, the Empress relaxes into a specifically feminine sphere of loyalty and support that guides her forward. Kreutzer crafts an elegant portrait that grants this historical figure a new lease of agency and autonomy. **CAITLIN QUINLAN**

ANTICIPATION. *Kreutzer's last feature was a festival highlight and Vicky Krieps is an undeniable star.* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *A brilliantly crafted portrait of a woman on the brink.* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *A lilting, heartfelt exploration of family, memory and what it means to be alive.* **4**

Interview by **MARINA ASHIOTI** Illustration by **STÉPHANIE SERGEANT**

Vicky Krieps

Refashioning the quaint image of the princess was not an easy task finds the star of Marie Kruezer's regal satire, Corsage.

At the centre of Marie Kreuzer's *Corsage* lies a spellbinding performance by Vicky Krieps as the Empress Elisabeth of Austria, who, upon turning 40, begins to unravel and rebel against her royal duties. The film marks a stunning run for the actor, following *Phantom Thread* and *Bergman Island*.

LWLies: What were your first encounters with Empress Elisabeth? Krieps: I knew her from the movies with Romy Schneider, which I was not allowed to watch at my house because my mum was very emancipated. We didn't have any princess stuff, but my neighbours did, so I would watch the movies there. They also had the biography, and I read it. As I got to the end of the book something started to feel very dark and sad, and I remember just staying with this mystery. I could just sense there was something wrong, but I was too young to understand. There seemed to be a difference between what I read and what I had seen in the Ernst Marischka movies.

What were the physical preparations you had to do? Everything [Laughs]. There was the horse riding on the ladies' saddle, and it is very difficult to ride on a ladies' saddle! It's just bloody stupid. I loved the fencing, but I had to learn to do it with high shoes and a corset which, again, is bloody stupid. You can't move. I could've screamed all through the shoot because every single thing was annoying and made me feel trapped. When I wore the corset I couldn't eat solid foods, so I had to make smoothies and soups and I could only eat at night. I knew probably every single thing about her you can imagine. I was full of a million different things, but once I was on set, I let it all go. In German we say '*scheiß drauf*', like I really didn't give a shit, because she wouldn't have given a shit – and that's what made her suffocate.

That definitely comes across in the ways you channel Sissi's melancholy through mischief, which brought this dark comedic element to the film. Sometimes when I needed strength – because it was very, very hard to make this movie – I would close my eyes and hold Sissi on my right hand and Romy Schneider on my left, and I would say: Okay, now we go to the playground. I wanted to give this gift to them; the possibility to play, and misbehave, and make mistakes and not be perfect. I wanted to break the image of the perfect beautiful princess, of the perfect beautiful actress that Romy Schneider had been trapped in. Both had suffered from the same thing. There was no makeup on my face, and I know that was such an important part of both their lives, trapped in being beautiful and having to live up to that beauty. What a terror, really!

I want to know what it was like to work with those beautiful dogs. Oh, I love them... but to work with them was a pain in the ass! This breed of dog isn't made to be trained like that. They are known to be almost like cats – very independent. But looking back, I love that they were misbehaving. My dress was always full of sausage for the dogs to follow me, but they still wouldn't follow! The costume designer had a fit because the dresses had grease stains on them from the sausage. There's a scene when Florian Teichtmeister comes in the room while I'm naked in the bed, and I think the dogs could feel something in his energy because they started defending me

Croupier

Directed by	**MIKE HODGES**
Starring	**CLIVE OWEN, ALEX KINGSTON, GINA MCKEE**

Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **5 DECEMBER**

Almost 30 years after his seminal *Get Carter*, Mike Hodges returned to the crime genre with *Croupier*, a slick, entertaining film about a writer who takes on work as a casino croupier in order to source material for a novel. It is set within various dingy casinos, hotels, and after-hours clubs, the film's depiction of a seedy, squalid sort of London is frank and unglamorous, and its plot revolves around various petty acts of deception, an extra-marital affair and a low-level robbery. The stakes feel high enough to make the film feel narratively propulsive without ever becoming so overdramatic as to seem unrealistic.

The slippery figure at the film's centre, Jack (played by a young, suave Clive Owen), makes for an intriguing lead character. Intended as a sort-of James Bond figure for the lad mag and *Lock, Stock* era, he instead comes off as privileged and vaguely embarrassing, commenting on everything he observes in a dry, sometimes hammy interior monologue while moving through the motions without any clear motivation beyond a general self-destructive impulse. The film works best as a documentary-like portrait of an underworld habituated by down-and-outs, drunks and small-time gangsters. Even those who think they know how to beat the game end up coming out as losers. **MATT TURNER**

Son of the White Mare

Directed by	**MARCELL JANKOVICS**
Starring	**GYÖRGY CSERHALMI, VERA PAP, MARI SZEMES**

Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **3 JAN 2020**

Long understood to be one of the most significant works of international animation, Marcell Jankovics' *The Son of the White Mare* has not been easy to see in the 40 years since its completion. Now restored to 4K, its availability has been improved and it's clear to see why it has such a hallowed reputation. Telling the folkloric story of a magical horse that gives birth to three sons who, in turn, become tasked with defending the planet from three rival multi-headed, hell-born dragons, the film is a visually resplendent showcase for the Hungarian animator's striking style of hand painted animation. Each new scene seems to outdo the psychedelic intensity of the one that preceded it.

With eye-catching character designs and richly realised landscapes throughout, the film unfolds as a cascade of bold, bright colours and fluid geometric patterns. As the three sons see to their respective foes, learning more about themselves and their developing powers, the film maintains its energy with the aid of István Vajda's bouncy symphonic score. No moment that is included seems superfluous. Each offers some kind of entertainment value or symbolic function. Four decades since its making, Jankovics' singular film hasn't aged at all, still proving to be an original psychedelic experience and a one-of-a-kind creative and technical accomplishment. **MATT TURNER**

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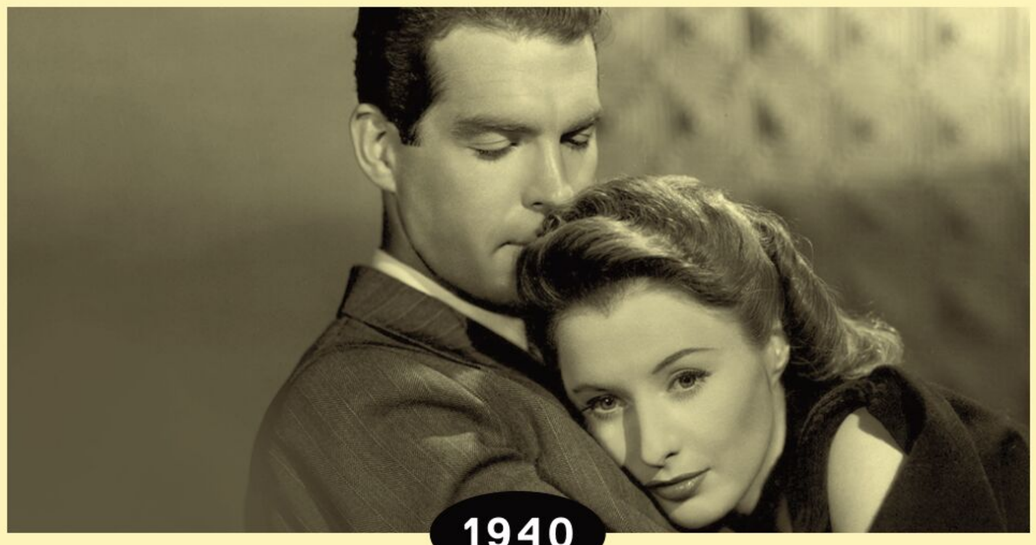

Remember the Night

Directed by **MITCHELL LEISEN**
Starring **BARBARA STANWYCK, FRED MACMURRAY, BEULAH BONDI**

Blu-ray/DVD | *Released* **5 DECEMBER**

"How long have you been swiping?" John (Fred MacMurray) asks Lee (Barbara Stanwyck), shortly after she is caught shoplifting. "Always," she replies with a smile, unafraid of being judged for her life of indiscretions. John, who she describes as a "straight shooter," is supposed to be acting against her as a prosecutor for the state. Instead, he sees something in her and, after causing a delay in her sentencing, ends up covering her bail in order to keep her out of jail.

In what is a clear breach of his legal duties, he then takes this fallen woman home with him from New York to Indiana, where they spread Christmas and New Year together with his family, a traditional, tight-knit unit who welcome her warmly despite her apparently unsavoury background. While there, the pair warm to each other, undergoing a series of adventures that show her the values of a virtuous life and teach him to lighten up a little. In doing this, they reassess their own understandings of life and how it should be lived, and what exactly they want from it. When described, the film sounds like standard classical Hollywood romantic fare, but it is considerably better. It is elevated by a smart and witty script from Preston Sturges and the unshowy turns of the two central performers, whose charisma and chemistry are clear from the film's very first moments. **MATT TURNER**

Mississippi Masala

Directed by **MIRA NAIR**
Starring **DENZEL WASHINGTON, ROSHAN SETH, SARITA CHOUDHURY**

Blu-ray/DVD | *Released* **12 DECEMBER**

Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* starts with a nervy setup that suggests a different sort of film to the one that follows. It opens in Kampala as young Mina (Sahira Nair) is in danger, fleeing the country with her mother Kinnu (Sharmila Tagore) and father Jay (Roshan Seth) that, as Ugandan Indians, they had always called home. We then flash forward 17 years, and Mina (played brilliantly as an adult by Sarita Choudhury), now 24, is living with her wider family in Mississippi. This initial scene-setting proves shows how the trauma the family faced through their displacement travels with them across continents, causing repercussions that ripple through the generations.

Mina starts a slow-developing but passionate secret romance with Demetrius (Denzel Washington), which is rumbled when Mina's family catches them together on a clandestine getaway. Mina's parents do not approve of the relationship, particularly her father, who still harbours resentment towards Black people as a result of the persecution he faced in Uganda under Idi Amin. As the couple try to push forward, Nair handles complex, tricky issues (including racism, colourism, culture clash and displacement) with assurance, having them play out subtly in the background of a well-told classical romantic narrative that is pushed forward by two compelling, believable lead performers that it is impossible not to root for. **MATT TURNER**

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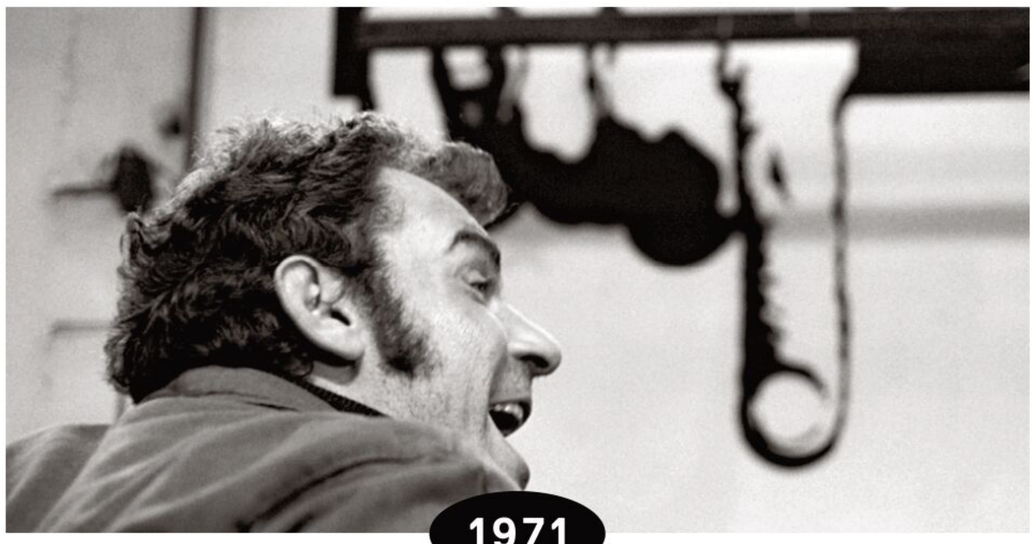

1971

The Working Class Goes to Heaven

Directed by	**ELIO PETRI**
Starring	**GIAN MARIA VOLONTÉ, MARIANGELA MELATO, GINO PERNICE**

Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **31 OCT**

At the start of Elio Petri's fiery factory drama *The Working Class Goes to Heaven*, a union agitator trying to awaken his enervated audience bellows that after just one shift in the factory, "you will come out old and empty." Instead of earning a fair day's wage, he argues, "you will have been robbed of eight hours of your day." Lulù Massa (Gian Maria Volonté), the film's lead, is initially dismissive of this rhetoric, committed to his work and proud about being one of the company's most loyal and productive workers. But after a nasty workplace injury which results in him losing a finger, he starts to see how oppressive the factory environment is.

This angry, politically charged, but also often also funny film is from an Italian director best known for the contemptuous and satirical works of political cinema he made throughout the 1960s and '70s. Volonté gives an impassioned, committed performance in which he is almost constantly shouting and sweating, running back and forth between his home, his workplace. Petri films him in abrasive closeups, moving the camera constantly to maintain the frenzied feeling of following a man who is always about to break. Over its duration, the film vividly shows how the system strangles its subjects, turning the workers against each other and breaking both their bodies and brains. **MATT TURNER**

1997

Nil by Mouth

Directed by	**GARY OLDMAN**
Starring	**KATHY BURKE, CHARLIE CREED-MILES, RAY WINSTONE**

Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **26 SEPT**

Many actors that turn to filmmaking show that going behind the camera isn't the best choice for them and that their talents are instead best spent appearing on-screen. That isn't the case with Gary Oldman, whose first and, to date, only feature, *Nil by Mouth* reveals him to be just as skilled a director as he is an actor, and also not the vainglorious sort who feels the need to place himself at the centre of his own creation.

A grim portrait of a dysfunctional family that is punctuated by moments of insight and levity, *Nil by Mouth* was a personal film for Oldman. Set in New Cross, where Oldman grew up, the film is credited to his father, but considering it is a film about an abusive patriarch, this dedication is not favourable. Featuring substance abuse, brutal domestic violence, heavy drinking and near-constant heated disagreement, in Oldman's kitchen sink vision of Britain, time moves slow, and life is full of suffering.

Yet despite this dreariness, the film is compelling – if a little baggy at the edges. The music cues are inspired, the cinematography is free-roaming and immersive, and all the performances are remarkable. Light on plot but full of expressive, expletive-heavy dialogue, it serves as a showcase for Ray Winstone, Kathy Burke, Charlie Creed-Miles and Laila Morse, all of whom bring a larger-than-life intensity to their roles and yet somehow remain entirely believable. **MATT TURNER**

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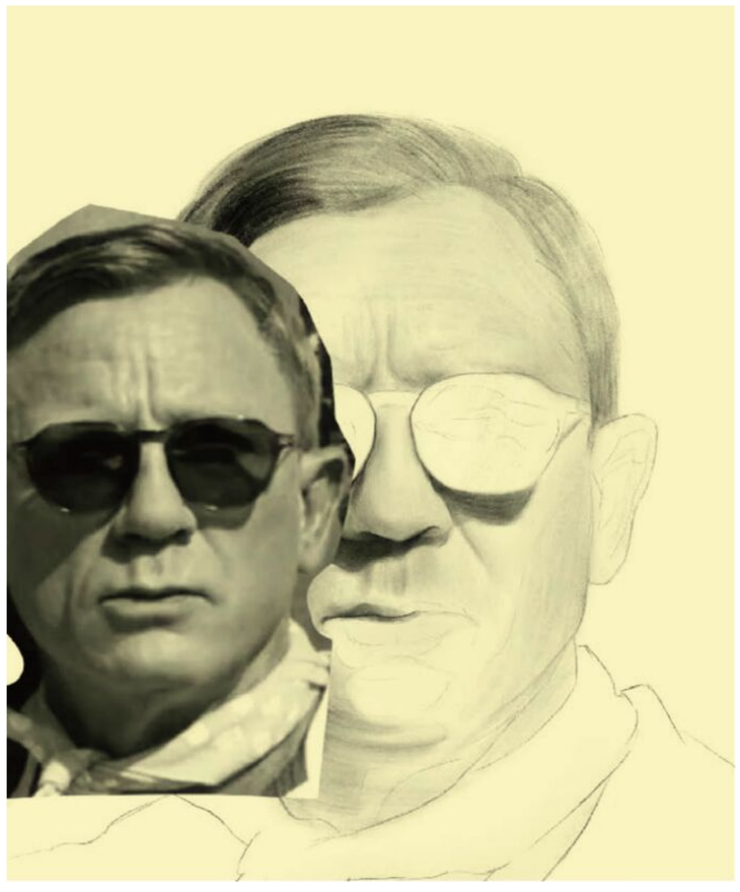

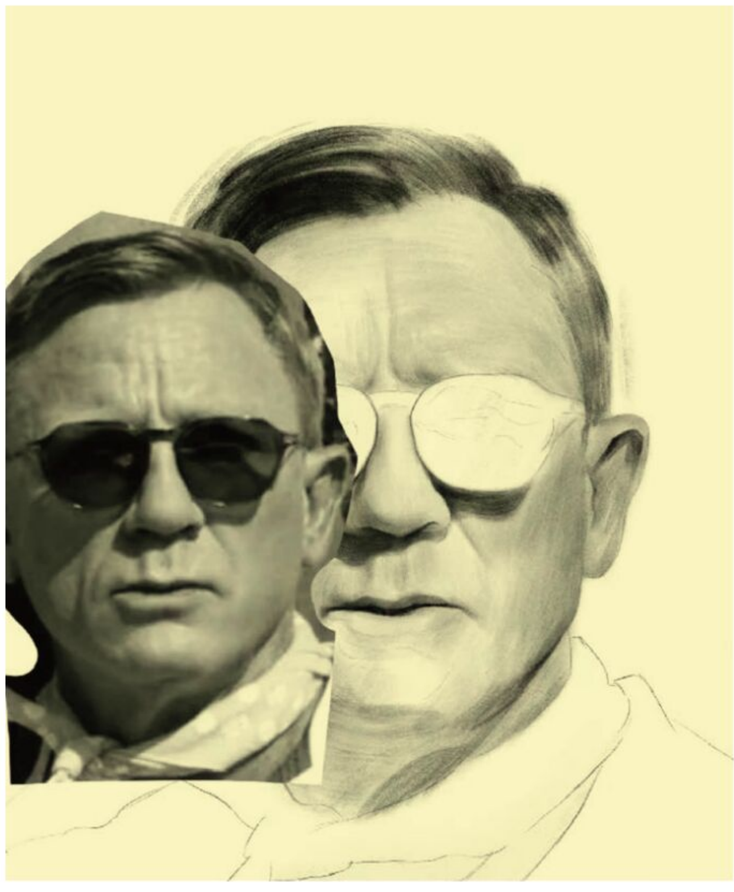

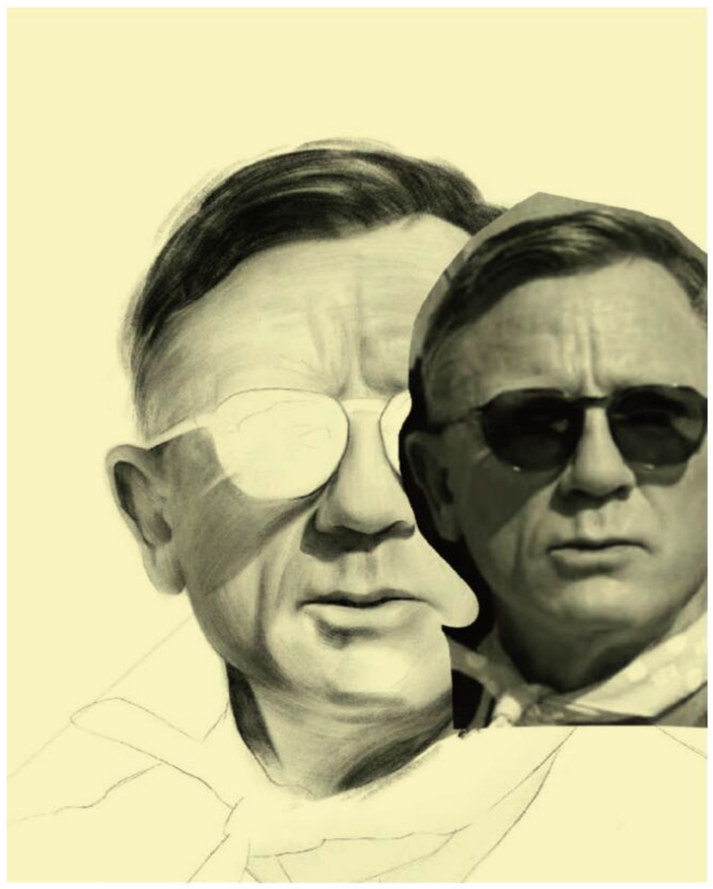

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ig: jrdncrtr

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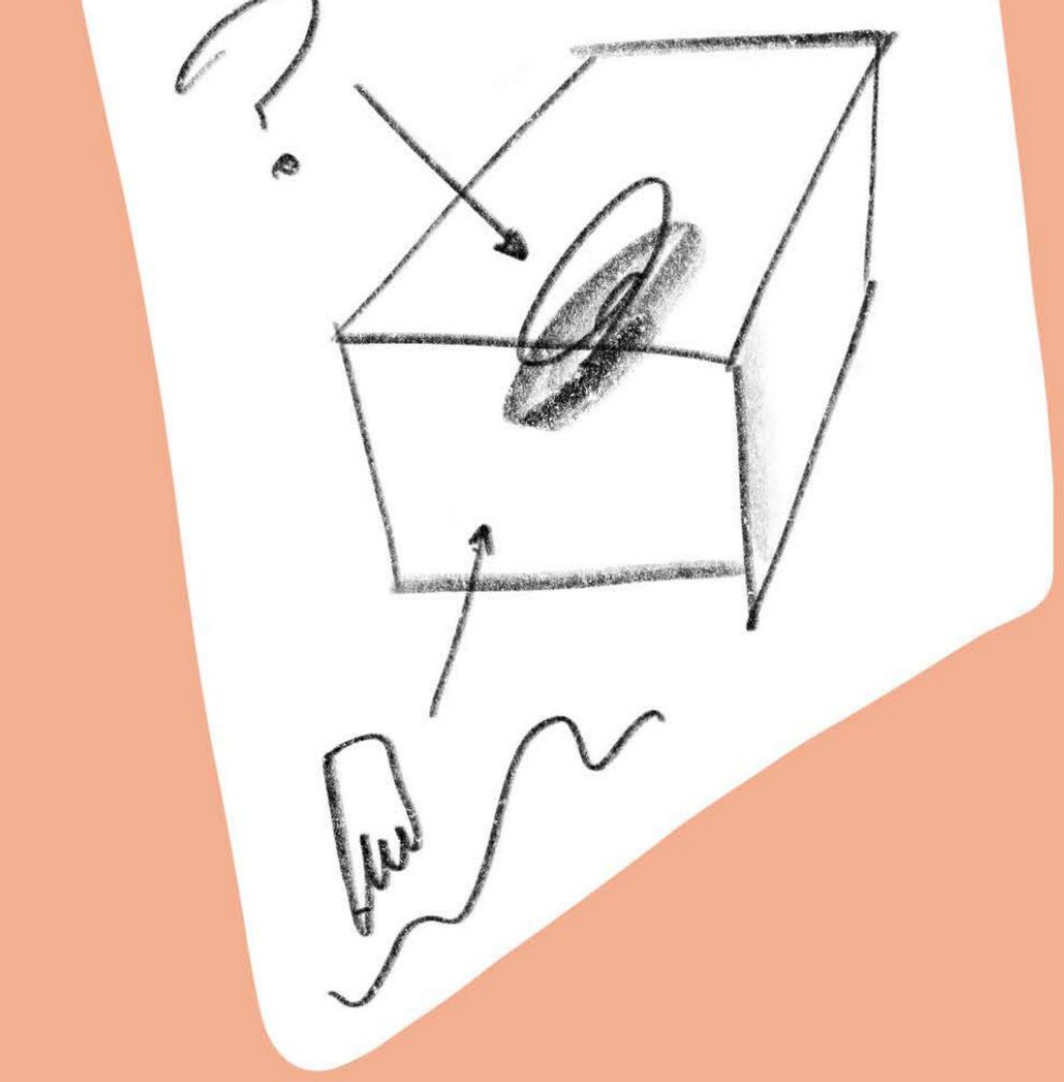

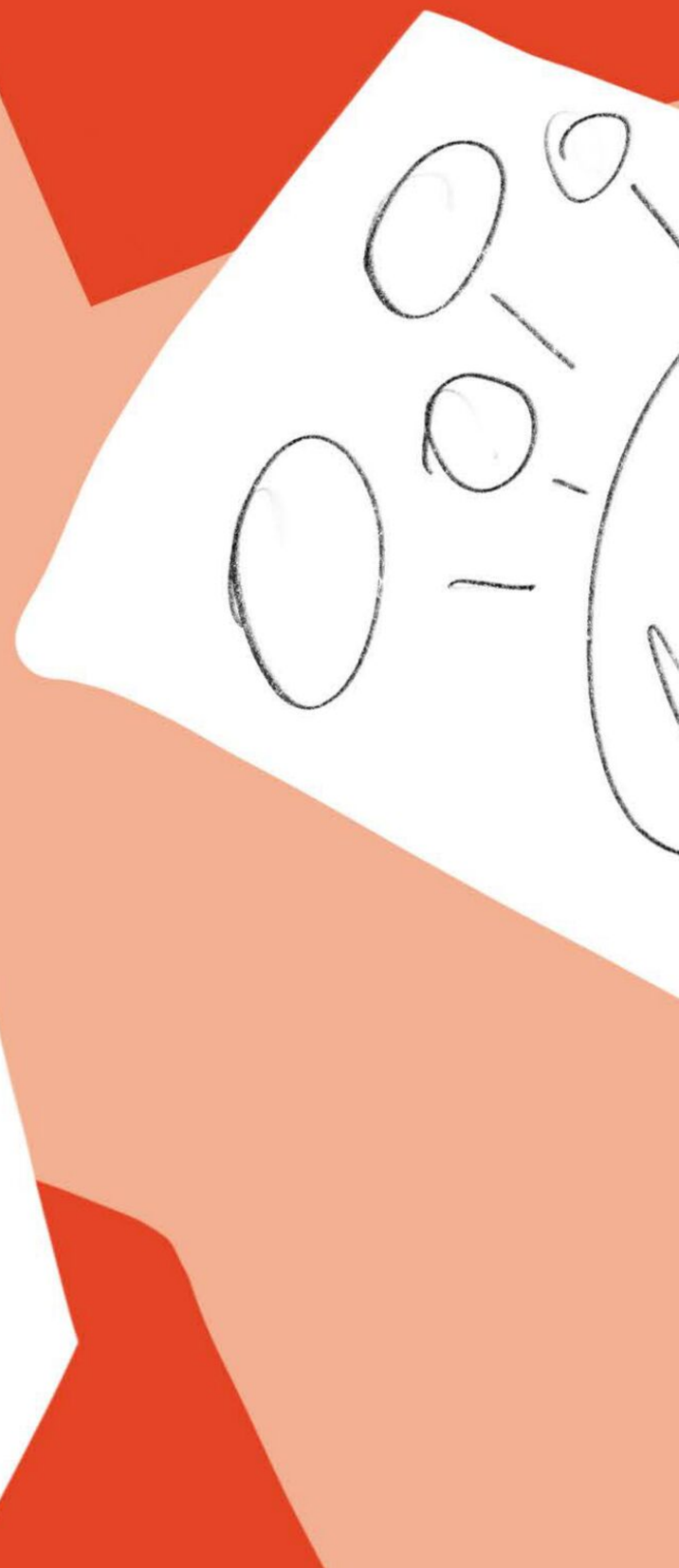

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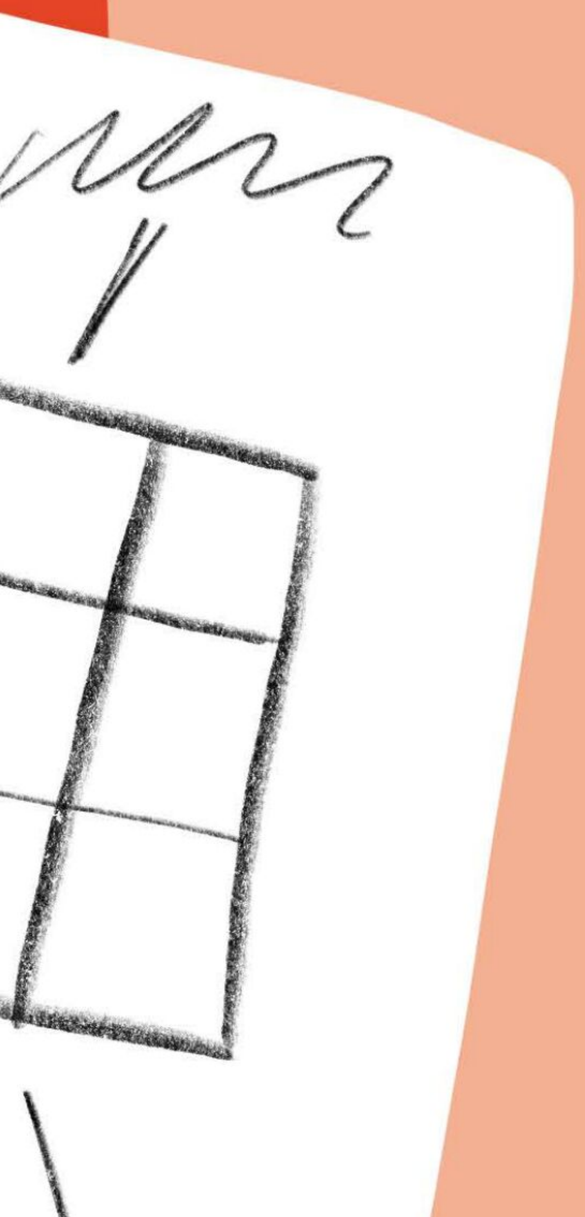

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Archipelago (20I0)
Atoll K (I95I)
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Casa de Lava (I995)
Castaway (I985)
Commando (I985)
The Creatures (I966)
Cul-de-sac (I966)
The Edge of the World (I937)
Ex Machina (20I6)
Fire at Sea (20I6)
Goto, Island of Love (I969)
Island of Lost Souls (I932)
Jurassmic Park (I994)
Komodo (I999)
The Lighthouse (20I9)
Man of Aran (I934)
Mamma Mia (2008)
Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence (I983)
The Most Dangerous Game (I932)
The Naked Island (I960)
Profound Desire of the Gods (I969)
Prospero's Books (I99I)
The Rock (i996)
Shutter Island (20I0)
Stromboli (I950)
Summer Interlude (I950)
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